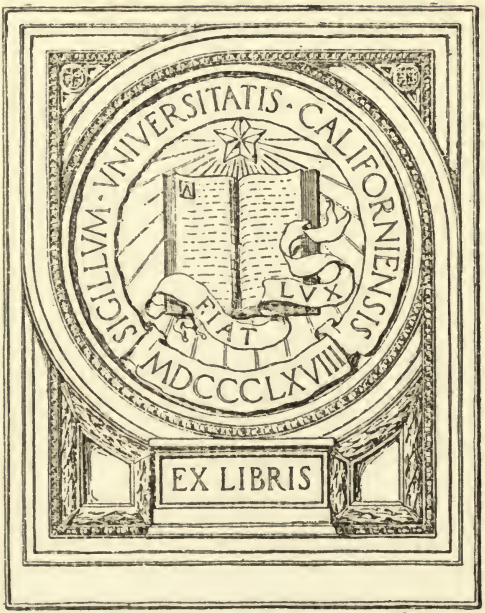
THE WISDOM OF FOOLS

BY

MARGARET DELAND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BY

MARGARET DELAND

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THE WISDOM OF FOOLS

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WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS 'T IS FOLLY TO BE WISE

I

"THE most delightful thing about our engagement is that everybody is so pleased with it." Amy Townsend said this, smiling down at her lover, who, full length on the grass beside her, leaned on his elbow, watching her soft hair blowing across her forehead, and the color of the sun flickering through the shadows, hot on her cheek; for she had closed her fluffy white parasol and taken off her hat here under an oak-tree on the grassy bank of the river.

"I should have thought that the fact that we were pleased ourselves was a trifle more important," he suggested. But Miss Townsend paid no attention to his interruption.

"You know, generally, when people get engaged, there are always people who

exclaim: either the man is too good for the girl (and you are too good for me, Billy!), or the girl is too good for the man" —

"She is; there is no question about that," the man interrupted.

"Be quiet!" the other commanded. "But in our case, everybody approves. You see, in the first place, you are a Parson, and I'm a Worker. That's what they call me, — the old ladies, — 'a Worker.' And of course that's a most appropriate combination to start with."

"Well, the old ladies will discover that my wife isn't going to run their committees for them," the parson said emphatically. "Besides, if I'm a Parson, you're a Person! How do the old ladies bear it, that I haven't any ancestors, and used to run errands in a tin-shop? *I*'m a Worker, literally enough."

"You are a goose!" she told him calmly. "Don't keep interrupting me, Billy. What do ancestors amount to? I admit I'm glad that none of mine were hanged (so far as I know), or that they didn't run off with other people's money

— or wives. (I 'd mind the wives less than the money, I must confess. I suppose you think that 's very mediæval in me?) But what credit is their good behavior to me? You are a credit to your people, whoever they were; and my own belief is that they were Princes!"

She had such a charming way of flinging up her head and looking down at him sidewise, that he was willing to have had any kind of ancestors, only to catch that look of joyous pride; and in his own joyousness he was impelled to try to take her hand in his: but her fingers were laced about her knee, and she shook her head.

"Stop! I 'm talking seriously; you must n't be silly. You must listen to the other reasons why we are approved of: First, you are a Parson, and I 'm a Worker. Secondly, you are forty-two, and 'it 's high time' — high time, sir! — 'for you to be married'; and I 'm twenty-seven — and, really, you know, 'my chances are lessening' — (that 's what they say, my dear); and I 'hardly deserve, after all these years' " —

"And offers?" suggested her lover.

"After all these *years*, Billy, — not to get a crooked stick in the end."

"I am not crooked, I will admit," he said.

"Thirdly," she proceeded, "you are very good-looking, and all the old Tabbies say that a handsome minister ought to be married."

"The old Tabbies might find something better to talk about," he said, his face hardening. "Oh, Amy, that 's the kind of thing that makes a man cringe! — I mean a minister. Here is this great, serious, strenuous matter of living — the consciousness of God; that 's what living is in its highest expression. And to further that consciousness is the divinest human passion. A man tries to do it, gives his life to it, and immediately he is food for chattering old women! They gossip about his affairs, or his clothes, or his looks, even!" William West sat up, his face stirred with anger and pity. "But I suppose I must admit that the Parsons bring it on themselves to some extent," he ended, with a sigh; "we don't mingle enough with men; they

distrust us, and think we talk twaddle about overcoming temptations we know nothing about. So, being shut out from masculine living, we do haunt tea-tables, and gabble about vestments. I suppose there 's no doubt of it. Amy, I believe that the old hunting, swearing parsons of three generations ago were of more real value in the world than the harmless creatures that we have now!"

He had a certain stern way of thrusting out his lower lip when he was very much in earnest, and drawing his strong brows together; an impatient fire sprang into his beautiful dark eyes. He turned and looked at her, claiming her understanding.

"Yes," she said; "yes, it is so. The belittling of the profession of the ministry is a dreadful thing — a shameful thing. I once heard a man say that 'Elderly unmarried women always had to have something to fuss over and coddle, something to lead around by a blue ribbon. Sometimes it was a poodle; sometimes it was a clergyman.' And there 's truth in it, Billy."

"There is," he said grimly.

"Well, dear," she reassured him, smiling, "your distinguished rudeness to the ladies of your congregation has at least protected you from the blue ribbon."

He began to protest, but the talk slipped back into their own affairs, and somehow he succeeded in getting her hand, and by and by they were silent, just for happiness, and because it was sunset, and the river was flickering with light, and there was a faint stir of leaves overhead. They were to be married in a fortnight, and they were going to have all their lives together to say how good life was, so there was no need to talk now.

As the girl had said, it really was a very satisfactory match. William West was a man whom every one honored, and many loved. For fifteen years he had been settled in Mercer; first as an assistant to old Mr. Brown, and then as rector of the church. But he had taken his place in the community as a man of strong judgment and high character; perhaps as a citizen, rather than as a minister. Men felt that he was a man before

he was a clergyman; not knowing that his calling had given him his highest manhood. He was singularly devoid of clerical affectation; consequently the influence of his own reverence was not vitiated by a suspicion of his common sense. In fact, his sanity in matters religious, joined to his knowledge of human nature, made him a man of importance in affairs municipal and social. That he had lived to be forty-two, and had not married, was from no asceticism; he was a very human person, and fully intended to have a wife; only, she must be just what he wanted. And so far, that "not impossible She" who was to possess his heart had never appeared. When she did, he recognized her immediately, and would have proposed to her the next day, had not a feeling of diffidence as to her sentiments deterred him for nearly two weeks. At the end of that time, he told her — ah, well, never mind what he told her! She, at least, will never forget the passion of that claiming.

Amy Townsend had come to spend the winter in Mercer, with a cousin. Of

course, the first Sunday she went to St. James's, as everybody who was anybody did. When she came home, her eyes were keen with interest.

"Do tell me about him, Cousin Kate," she said. "I never heard that sort of preaching; what does it mean? Is he a real person, or is he just clever?" Mrs. Paul laughed.

"Wait till you meet him! you 'll see."

But she also added to herself, "Wait till he meets you!" For Mrs. Paul was one of those courageous women who rush in where angels fear to tread; she was a match-maker.

"Is he married?" the girl asked, naturally enough; but blushed furiously the next instant, which made her angry.

"No; but it is not for lack of opportunity," said Mrs. Paul dryly. "I declare, Amy, women are dreadful fools, sometimes! I should think a clergyman would n't marry, out of sheer disgust for their silliness."

"Oh, he 's run after, is he?" Miss Townsend said coldly.

"Well, I must admit he 's very attrac

tive," Mrs. Paul began, remembering her scheme, and retreating a little, — for nothing will put a girl against a man sooner than to know he is "run after."

Then she told his story: the boy had been a waif. ("His mother was respectable, I think," said Mrs. Paul, "but nobody knows anything about the father.") He had had that dreariest sort of childhood which knows no other home than an institution. Then, somehow, "quite like a story-book," Mrs. Paul said, a gentleman took an interest in him, and began to help him in one way or another.

"It was that zoölogical man, Professor Wilson; you know who I mean?" Mrs. Paul explained. "He looked after him. At first he put him in a tinshop, if you please, as errand-boy, — fancy! this man with the 'grand manner.'"

"Oh, I supposed he was a gentleman," Amy Townsend said.

"Amy, you are a snob," her cousin answered hotly. "He is."

Mrs. Paul was so annoyed that she ended the story of Mr. West's career very briefly. "Professor Wilson offered

either to start him in business or put him through college; he chose to go to college."

"That was rather fine," Miss Townsend agreed.

"Fine? It just showed what sort of a man he was!" cried Mrs. Paul. "He worked his way to some extent; that is, he was Professor Wilson's secretary, and he did a lot of tutoring. Professor Wilson left him a good deal of money, but he gave away nearly half of it at once, John says. Quite remarkable for a young man. Well, that's all; you see what he is to-day — a gentleman and a scholar: John says there is no man in Mercer who has the influence that he has."

Miss Townsend, in spite of her careful indifference, was interested. And later, when Rev. William West met her, he, too, was "interested;" and all fell out as the most experienced romancer could desire.

Amy had a little money, much charm, a certain distinction that answered for beauty, and a very true nature; there was, perhaps, a certain hard integrity

about her, but her impulses were gracious. Also, as the old ladies said, she was a "worker." She found life too interesting not to meddle with it.

So it had come to pass that these two, who, as Mrs. Paul said, "were made for each other," were going to be married.

. . . . . .

"Just think, in two weeks!" he said, as they sat there under the oak, the blossoming grass knee-deep about them, and the air sweet with clover. "Amy, it does not seem as if I had been alive until now."

"I wonder, does it go on getting — nicer?" she asked him, a little shyly; "everything seems to be better, and more worth while."

"I understand," he said.

And they were silent for awhile, because understanding is enough, when people are in love. Then the girl's gayety began to sparkle out.

"Billy, Cousin Kate says if I 'm not careful I 'll get to be a managing Parsoness; she says I must devote myself to you, not to your poor people."

"Mrs. Paul has given a great deal of good advice in her day," the Rev. Billy remarked meditatively, "and I really think very little harm has come from it."

"She advised your being called to Mercer," Amy retorted. "Did you know that?"

"Know it? My dear child! how often have I dined at the Pauls'? Just so often have I heard it."

"Now, Billy, that's not very nice in you."

"I but stated a fact; and I have a high regard for Mrs. Paul. Only, when I think how many girls she has tried to make marry me! — but they would none of them look at me."

"And in two weeks the opportunity will be gone," she jeered.

"Poor girls!" the minister commiserated; and was reproved for vanity. Indeed, just because happiness is so serious a thing, they became very frivolous, these two, sitting watching the sunset, and the river. Amy told him a funny story about the parish; he responded by another concerning Tom Reilly, a police-

man; which reminded Amy to tell him that poor Tom had had an accident, and hurt his hand.

"But it was very stupid in him," she added, with a little of that resentful goodness that one sees sometimes in women. "I'm not at all sorry for him, because he deserved it. He had been drinking, and as he went stumbling out of a car, he crushed his hand in the door."

Her lover was not to be lured into professional comments; he only muttered, "*Mauvais quart d'heure*" — which made her say indignantly: "Now, Billy, really, that is *too* much!" and insist that they should go home immediately. "I cannot descend to such levels," she told him; and was very stern and forbidding when, looking to the right and left, and seeing no man, he begged to be allowed to kiss her.

But this was all froth. Beneath, in the man's life, were the great tides of love, moving, noiseless and unchangeable, from out the depths of his soul. In the girl's life it was all shine and perfume and glitter, like flowers blossoming on a rock;

beneath, in her heart, was the solid ground of reverence and faith.

II

The two weeks that were to pass before the day that was to be the Day of Days were very full.

To get parish work ahead so that things would run themselves for the month's absence which had been granted the clergyman was no small undertaking. William West was very busy, and a little preoccupied in his endeavor to put his best thought, not upon his own happiness, but upon committees, or Sunday-school matters, or his assistant's spiritual anxieties concerning his superior's indifference to the color of the lectern bookmarks; so it chanced that he saw less of Amy than in the earlier part of their engagement. He had but little time to think of her, and absolutely no time to think of himself.

They were to be married on Thursday. Late Monday afternoon Mr. West, with great timidity, ventured into Mrs. Paul's

drawing-room, with the bold purpose of abstracting his sweetheart for a walk. The project was, of course, promptly crushed.

"As though Amy had any time for that sort of thing!" said Mrs. Paul. "Do you see those presents? She has got to acknowledge every one of them! Amy, your cousin John and I will entertain Mr. West. You can write your notes here, and let him look at you; that's quite enough for him."

Amy smiled at him across a barricade of silver bric-à-brac.

"Billy thinks silver picture-frames and brushes and things are a dreadful waste of money," she said. "Just think how thankful you ought to be, Billy, that I am making our manners for you; you could n't say 'Thank you,' with truth."

"Oh, truth," said John Paul, lounging about the room, with his hands in his pockets — "truth, my dear little cousin, is governed by the law of benefit; did n't you know that? If it makes the donors feel happy, tell them West has longed for nothing in the world so much as a silver

glove buttoner. Now, if you told them the truth, fancy the shock! Ask the Parson."

"The Parson has no such base and cynical theory," Miss Townsend responded promptly; "have you, Billy? You don't think truth is governed by the law of benefit?"

"I think truth-telling is," he assured her.

John Paul assumed that look of artless and simpering satisfaction which one sees on the countenance of the unprotected male, who, in the bosom of his family, finds himself indorsed by a higher power.

"There, Amy, what did I tell you? I had an instance of it yesterday. I" —

"Oh, here is a third asparagus fork," murmured Amy; "what *shall* I say about it?"

"What 's your instance?" said the minister.

"Well, we 've been looking for an assistant engineer, and there have been the Lord only knows how many applicants. One fellow impressed me very

well; he seemed as straight as a string; honest face, thoroughly decent-looking fellow. He was an Englishman, but his references for three years were American. So much the better, of course. I was going to engage him, when, bless my soul, if he did n't begin to stammer out something about having no references from 'Home' ('ome,' he called it), because he 'ad n't been over steady,' but he 'd signed the pledge, and 'he was n't afraid of drink any more.' I did n't hire him. Now, I call that truth not governed by the law of benefit."

"You don't discriminate between being truthful and telling the truth," said William West. "You had n't asked him if he had ever drank. I don't believe you lost much, in not engaging him, poor fellow."

"Oh, Billy, I think it was rather fine in him," Amy protested, looking up from her notes.

"I don't see anything fine," the minister said simply. "In the first place, there was a lack of reserve, a lack of privacy, in rushing into confession, which

betrays the weak nature. There was also self-consciousness, in dwelling on his sin. And in the third place" —

"This sounds like a sermon: firstly — secondly" — Amy murmured, signing her name to her thanks for the third asparagus fork.

— "in the third place, if the man has reformed, there was an essential untruth in posing as a sinner."

"Well, I don't quite agree with that," began Mrs. Paul.

"He's right; he's right," John Paul declared. "I say, West, suppose we went about confessing some of our college performances?" The senior warden of St. James grinned, but his wife looked displeased.

"I don't believe you ever did anything very bad, John; but if you did, I think you should have confessed to me."

"I stole some signs, Kate," he told her; "can you forgive me?"

Amy, listening, smiling, said with that charming sidewise glance at her lover: "Cousin Kate is quite right. I should never forgive a man who didn't tell me

everything! Billy, come here and confess. Have you ever done anything wicked?"

"We are all miserable sinners," John Paul murmured. "I say so publicly every Sunday" —

"But you don't specify!" the minister reminded him, with a laugh.

"Yes; but, Billy," Amy Townsend insisted, "does n't it say somewhere that 'confession is good for the soul'?"

"Perhaps it is," he said dryly, "but, generally speaking, it 's mighty bad for the mind."

There was an outcry at this from the two women.

"Of course," Mrs. Paul said, "simply gossiping about one's self is n't confession; but don't you think, Mr. West, in the really deep relations of life, between friend and friend, or husband and wife, there should be no reserves?"

"My dear Mrs. Paul," he answered, with quick gravity, "there must be reserves — except with God. The human soul is solitary. But for confession, that is different; justice and reparation sometimes

demand it; but, again, justice and courage sometimes forbid it. Unless it is necessary, it is flabby vanity. That's why I said it was bad for the mind."

"Well," said Amy, with some spirit, "I don't believe in taking respect, or — or love, on false pretenses. If I had ever done any dreadful thing, I should want to confess; good gracious, for the mere comfort of it I should have to! It would be like walking on a volcano to keep a secret."

William West went over to the table where she was writing, and, finding a place among the clutter of presents to lean his elbow, sat down and looked at her with good-humored amusement.

"Where are you going to draw the line? How far back are you going in confessing your sins? Please don't tell me that you slapped your nurse when you were three. It would be a horrible shock, and make me very unhappy to discover such a crime."

"I shall go all the way back," said Amy, with decision; "if I had done anything wrong, I mean very wrong, I should

tell you, — if I had only been a year old!"

The minister laughed. "A desperate villain of one year!" he said; but as he spoke a puzzled look came into his eyes.

"I think," Amy Townsend proceeded, "that honor and fairness demand speaking out. And as for making some one else unhappy," her voice dropped a little, and the color came up into her face, "where people love each other, they have a right to unhappiness."

"Listen to Amy clamoring for unhappiness!" John Paul commented. "Don't worry, my child; you 'll get your share. There 's enough to go round, I 've noticed."

Mrs. Paul laughed, but a note of reality had come into the careless talk that gave her a sense of being a third party.

"John, you are flippant," she said; "come, let 's leave these two poor things alone; they 're dying to get rid of us. And besides, if Amy is going to confess her sins since she was one year old, it will take time."

"That I consider a most uncalled for

reference to my twenty-seven years," Amy retorted; "and besides, I've two more notes to write."

"And I must go home," William West said, rising in a preoccupied manner.

"Why — but I thought you were going to stay to dinner!" Mrs. Paul protested, with dismay.

"Oh, you must stay to dinner," Amy urged.

But her lover was resolute. Nor did he, as usual, try to lure her out into the hall that he might make his adieus. He said good-night, stopped a moment to discuss with his senior warden something about the appropriation for repairs at St. James, and then, with a sober abstraction deepening in his face, went home through the delicate June dusk, which was full of the scent of the roses that grow behind the garden walls of the old-fashioned part of Mercer.

III

The Rev. William West went into his study and shut the door. He was a man who was always accessible to his people, yet his lips tightened with impatience when he found a parishioner awaiting him, and saw a pile of notes on his writing-table. But it was only for an instant; he listened to the anxieties of his caller with that concentration of sympathy which can put self aside; and when the man went away it was with the other man's heartfelt grip of the hand, his heartfelt "I thank you for coming to me; God bless you, my friend, and give you wisdom."

The letters were not so easy; but he went through them faithfully, answering them or filing them away: appeals for help, or money, or work; two invitations; two letters from ladies of his congregation about their souls; the unmarried and interesting clergyman knows this sort of letter too well! He was aware of a sense of haste in getting through with these things; a sense of

haste even in disposing of another caller, a boy, who came to say he had doubts about the existence of God, and who felt immensely important in consequence. "I tell you, Mr. West," this youth declared, nodding his head, "of course I don't mean to be hard on the church; of course I see the value of such a belief in keeping the masses straight, but, for thinking men!" To treat this sort of thing seriously and patiently is one of the trials of a thinking man who happens to be a minister. Then the Tenor came to give his side of the quarrel with the Bass, and the organist to say that quartette and chorus were all fools.

One does not prove the existence of God, or pacify wounded artistic feelings easily; it was nearly midnight before the clergyman had his library to himself.

With a sigh of relief he shut the door, and walked once or twice about the room, as though trying to shake off other people's affairs; then he bit off the end of a cigar, struck a match, and sat down. He put his hands deep into

his pockets, and stretched his feet straight out in front of him.

"It must be five years since I've thought of it," he said to himself.

He held his lighted cigar between his fingers, his chin sunk on his breast, his mouth set in that hard line which refuses to extenuate or evade; his eyes narrowed with thought. Five years: Yes, the memory had so faded and lessened that by and by it had ceased, and now it was as though, as he walked along the level path of daily life, a serpent suddenly lifted its evil head from the dust, and struck at him, hissing.

"I was eighteen," he said to himself; "no, nineteen. And now I'm forty-two! Twenty-nine, thirty-nine — it's twenty-three years ago."

There is a hideous consciousness which comes to most of us men and women at one time or another in our lives, of our inability to get away from the past. From out of the "roaring loom of Time" comes the fabric of our lives; white, run, perhaps, with a warp of silver in our latter years; set, even, by

the mercy of God, with deep jewels of experience; spangled with golden threads of opportunity; but back, in its beginnings — what stains, what rents! dragged through what foul and primeval experiences of youth! Some, by environment and temperament, have nothing to blush for but follies; the joyous baseness of the young animal never broke through the conditions of their lives, or the dullness of their minds. But for most there are black spots from which, with wonder and disgust, the adult turns away his eyes: the cruelty and impurity of childhood; the ingratitude and meanness of youth. With the man, as with the race, that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural.

Twenty-three years ago: is there any connection between a fault committed then and the William West of to-day? None! What has he in common with the boy of nineteen? Nothing!

Suppose he told Amy, would she understand that? Why, the very fact that he had forgotten it meant that he

did not belong to it, nor it to him. And yet he wanted to tell her!

William West got up with an impatient gesture. How absurd this sort of mental posturing and agonizing was! What folly, to think of burdening Amy with the miserable facts. Told now, twenty-three years afterwards, their relation to his present life could not be seen in true proportion. It would be an amazement and a shame to her to think that her lover, her husband, had done thus and so. Yet, it would not be her husband who was the sinner; it was that poor, foolish, wicked boy of so many years ago; that boy upon whom he looked back with the amazement and disgust of an outside observer. What a curious untruth, then, in confessing it. He gave a sigh of relief as he reached this conclusion; it was as if he had stumbled for a moment, but had got his balance again.

But, in spite of himself, his mind crept back to the brink of that black abyss of memory: those were dreadful days, those days of repentance twenty years ago. The

remembrance of his sin would surge over him at the most unexpected moments — in the midst of work or study; when he was talking; when he was praying; when, perhaps, he was helping some other human creature stagger along under a burden of remorse. The deeper he went into the new life he had begun to lead — the clearer the heavenly vision grew before his eyes — the blacker the sin seemed. For years, the memory of it used to come over him with a sudden sinking and sickening of the soul. He remembered how inescapable the torment of his regret had been. There would be periods of forgetfulness, when he was plunged into work, and life, because it was service, seemed good and sweet; then, at some word, or the look of the sky, or the smell of a flower — the evil spirit of recollection would leap upon him and tear him. Yet the periods of forgetfulness had lengthened and lengthened. The pain and shame had faded and faded. The thing that gave him this sick feeling, as he sat here in his study at midnight, was not the fact that he had sinned; it was the memory

of how he had suffered for his sin. The sin itself, now, was too remote, too separate from himself for any more repentance; it had ceased to be real. But the suffering! — he could not bear to think of that.

"How mad this is!" he said to himself, with a curious terror lest the old anguish should come back: the horror a man might feel who sees the surgeon's knife under which he has once agonized.

For very fear of memory, William West drove his thoughts back to the question of his duty to Amy; that was plain reasoning, and had nothing to do with this nightmare.

He lighted another match, but held it absently, until it scorched his fingers, then flung it down with an angry exclamation. It seemed as though the pain burned through all this fog of the past, and showed him the facts which he must judge, and the folly of his uncertainty. For, after all, what was this matter he was trying to decide? Was it not merely the question of what was best for Amy, not what was most comfortable for him-

self? It was that abstraction called Honor, as applied to Amy's happiness.

What was for her happiness, or, as he had put it first, what was his duty to her? To let her know his past, or to keep a secret from her, and allow her to suppose that she knew his life as she did her own?

Admit that it was his impulse to tell her; what did that impulse really mean? Primarily, that it would be a great relief to him; the idea of having any reserves was most repugnant to him. For the moment the instinct was again strong to tell her. But, frowning, he went on with his argument: A relief to him; but what to her? A pain and a shame; a memory that might outlast another twenty-three years, perhaps. But she might want to know it? Well, that was no reason. If she wanted poison, should he give it to her? And this was poison. Did he not know that? Good God!

But she had a right to know it? Here he was perfectly clear; certainly not. It in no wise bore upon his relation to her. Furthermore, the question of prudence

was not involved; there was no chance that some day, somehow, it might come to her ears. She could never hear it, except from him. If this were not the case, of course he would tell her.

But was he deceiving her? Was he, as she put it, "taking her love on false pretenses"? William West got up and walked the length of his library; then he stopped by the open window, and looked out on the silent street; a policeman on his beat glanced up and saw him, and touched his helmet with two fingers.

"Good-evening, sir; don't know but what I 'd better say good-morning!"

"What! Is it as late as all that, Reilly?" the minister said; and added a friendly inquiry about the man's hand, which seemed to be hurt. Amy's stern sense of the retributive justice of the accident came into his mind, and he smiled involuntarily. The policeman looked sheepish, as the clergyman meant he should, and turned the conversation by remarking that he would "be lookin' after the rectory special when Mr. West was away on his weddin' tower."

"Thank you, Reilly!" the other answered heartily.

The policeman's steps went echoing off into the night; a street lamp flickered, and a puff of soft wind wandered into the window.

Deceiving her: taking her love under false pretenses.

Was he anything but the man Amy supposed him to be? Very humbly, very truly, he said to himself that, by the grace of God, he was an honest, pure, God-fearing man. That sin of twenty-three years ago was not his sin. He, William West, forty-two years old, whose honorable record in the community was spread through all these years of service, was not that base, mean, wicked boy. The sin was not his. It was a sin of youth; a sin almost of childhood. It meant nothing to him now.

"It is nothing now," he insisted, passionately. Accustomed to weigh other people's actions and motives, he knew that he was discriminating with almost judicial impartiality when he thus looked himself in the face. "*A repentant man*

has no more to do with his sin, for which he has repented and made reparation, than a well man has to do with the disease of which he has been cured." He remembered that he had used this illustration once to some one else; he must apply it now to himself. No; he was not deceiving Amy. He was only sparing her — sparing her, to be sure, from a pain she might wish to bear, but that had nothing to do with the question. If she knew, she would suffer; not from a fact, but from an illusion; for he would be confessing a sin which was not his sin. Honor? The word seemed artificial as he thus put the situation before him.

No; it would be cowardly to tell her, and it would be untrue. There was nothing for him to do but face the fact that, to spare her, he must bear, for the rest of his life, the wretched burden of realizing that he had a secret from her.

Sanely, truly, this good man believed that his impulse to tell the woman he loved was selfish and cowardly; it was an impulse to make her share a burden which he deserved to bear alone. Fur-

thermore, it was the effect, not of reason, not of religion, not of love; it was the effect, first, of the selfish desire to seek relief by sharing a cruel knowledge; secondly, of a traditional sentimentality, the weak and driveling outcome of that sense of justice which is expressed in the willingness to bear consequences.

Well, the boy who had sinned had borne the consequences; he had suffered.

For the man to suffer now, twenty-three years after, was unreasonable, but inevitable.

For a woman, who had no part or lot in that young past, to suffer now, twenty-three years afterwards, was foolish and useless.

If the man permitted it, he was a coward and a fool.

This, at least, was what William West told himself.

IV

The conclusion to which the Rev. Mr. West came was that, if his love for Amy was deep enough and unselfish enough, he would hold his tongue. He believed that confession, apart from reparation, was the refuge of the weak mind.

Having thus decided to bear alone the burden of his secret, he went, early in the morning, and told the woman he loved.

Of course, there is no explanation of this vacillation and indifference to his own judgment, except the mere statement that he was in love.

"Amy is trying on her dress," Mrs. Paul said, when he was ushered into the library, "so, if you want to see her, you can go home at once. But perhaps you may condescend to talk to me a little while?"

"I must see Amy, please," he said. He had a way of putting people aside so gently and peremptorily that Mrs. Paul, who was not a yielding person, never dreamed of protesting.

"I 'll tell her. But she really can't come down for ten minutes. Do you mind waiting?"

"Very much," he said smiling. "Tell her to come down just as she is, and let me see her frock."

"Indeed, she shan't do anything of the sort," said Mrs. Paul, with indignation; but relented to the extent of letting him have the library to himself, and going upstairs to send the girl to him.

Amy came floating in with a snowy gleam and rustle, and stood before him, bidding him not to dare to touch her; though, indeed, being a mere man, he was far too uncomfortably awed to think of taking this glorious white creature into his poor human arms.

"You are magnificent, but you are not Amy," he said; "do get on some common clothes. I 'm afraid of you."

"That is as it should be, sir!" she told him. "I shall dress like this every day if it keeps you obedient. If I had had on my wedding-dress last night, you would not have dared not to stay to dinner when I — wanted you."

Her look, through the mist of tulle, of soft reproach and challenge, was too much for fear, and he boldly kissed her; which made her protest, and fly from further risk of crushing the bravery of her wedding-day. When she came back again, in a blue cotton gown, trig and pretty, with a bunch of pansies in her belt, there was, fortunately, nothing to be hurt by being crushed.

There was a moment of tender and passionate silence. His errand faded from William West's mind; the reality of life was here! his past was no more to him than the eggshell is to the eagle. So when, later, leaning forward in his chair, holding her hand in his, looking into her pure eyes, he began to speak, it was almost casually. Before the great fact of human love, the question of telling her or not telling her of that old dead and buried sin was suddenly unimportant, — they loved each other!

"Dear," he said, "I 've come to tell you something. What you said last night about having no reserves put it into my head. I had forgotten it."

It was characteristic of the man that there was no preamble; his words were simple, and he was perfectly matter-of-fact and unanxious; so much so that Amy laughed.

"Were you a year-old criminal? Well, tell me at once! I may reconsider, you know."

There was something in the assurance of her gayety that jarred a little, and he said seriously: —

"It is a wrongdoing of my youth, Amy. I 'm not sure that it is not selfish to tell you about it; but I can't bear the feeling of holding anything back from you."

An answering gravity came into the girl's face, but she smiled.

"Tell me anything; I am not afraid to hear!"

Her innocent pride gave him a moment of sharp discomfort. Curiously enough, what he had to tell her had not connected itself, in his mind, with personal embarrassment; it had been too remote from himself. He found

himself hesitating for a word, and grasping after that indifference to all but Love which he had felt but a moment before.

"Perhaps I am a fool to tell you," he began; "it may make you unhappy, and"—

A startled look came into Amy's eyes; then the color flooded up into her face. She lifted her head with a beautiful, imperious gesture, and stopped him with a word.

"I—understand. Don't tell me. I—understand." She bit her lip as she spoke, and her eyelids quivered as though the tears had risen suddenly.

"You understand?" he repeated, in a puzzled voice; "do you mean you don't want me to tell you?"

"William," she said, in a low voice, "I do not think a woman has any business with a good man's life in the past; if—he was not good. I am not a young girl. I am old enough to know that a man's life and a girl's life are—different; but don't tell me. I—love you. Don't

tell me." She trembled as she spoke, and then her eyes sought his, filled with love and grief.

A wave of tenderness made his whole face melt and quiver. He murmured something of his undesert of such love as this: —

"You are not like other women," he told her, as every lover has told his mistress since the sun first shone on lovers. "That sin, the mean woman does not forgive. And yet it is so much more pardonable than some other sins! More pardonable, dear, than what I want to tell you."

She drew a quick breath and smiled. "Ah," she said, "I'm glad it is not that!" Her relief was so apparent that he realized how austerely sweet her face had been as she forgave him.

"Go on and tell me," she said; "I am not afraid to hear anything now."

"That would have been the hardest thing to forgive?" he asked her. She flashed a look of pride at him.

"The things I could not forgive, you could not do!"

This made him glow. After all, who would not confess anything, to be met by such confident love as this?

"This happened long ago, Amy; when I was nineteen. I forged a check for five hundred dollars."

"Forged!" Her lips fell apart; she sat staring at him.

He was holding her hand, lifting it to his lips sometimes, and looking at it as it lay in his. He went on, quietly: —

"It was when I was at college; I needed money; and — poor, desperate, wicked, silly young man — I forged Professor Wilson's name. I don't know what I supposed would become of me when it was found out. And I don't know what would have become of me, but Henry Wilson died before the month was out, and so, by some strange chance, it never was discovered. If it had been — well, you and I would not have been here to-day. Human justice would have interposed before Divine mercy" — He looked up with a solemn elation which seemed to put self out of his mind. "I might have gone lower and lower! Who

can say? It was an easy thing to do, for I was his secretary, and he trusted me. That, of course, was the most horrible part of what I did, the part that now seems to me incomprehensible — the broken trust! Well, of course, I made reparation, as I called it, out of the money he left me. I gave away many times the amount I stole; but it was only because I was scared at the risk I had run, and the thought of it harassed me. It was a sort of expedient morality, you know; a sort of bargain with my conscience for peace of mind. Then, about a year afterwards, I met X——. I heard him preach, and life changed. How extraordinary it seems to look back upon it now! Then I repented. Before, I had only reformed. That was when I entered the divinity school. But just think, Amy, just think of the difference! How life might have gone — yet here I am to-day, your lover, your husband. Oh, the mercy of God!"

He was deeply moved. He got up and walked the length of the room. Amy sat silently looking down at her

hands in her lap. When he came back, his eyes were full of peace.

"That is all, dearest; now we will forget it. You know my life as you do your own."

"Forget it?" she repeated, with a sudden, sobbing laugh, that tore at the man's heart.

"Amy! dearest! have I shocked you so? Remember, it was twenty-three years ago; I was only a boy. Let me tell you how it was: I was madly in love with a woman; at least, it was not love, but I thought it was; she fascinated me, and" —

"Oh, go on — go on!" she interrupted, hoarsely; "as if I cared about that!"

He tried to take her hand, but she made a pretense of arranging the flowers in her belt; her head was turned a little from him. He leaned forward, with a grave authority to command her attention, took the pansies from her, and held them in his hand.

"I was possessed to marry her. Of course, she would not look at me —

a penniless, charity student. But I strained every nerve to win her. It was the old story. She took my flowers, or theatre tickets, or anything I could give her. Curious, the mercenariness of the woman did not revolt me! But I was mad about her. I thought, at last, that if I had money I could give her some jewels she wanted, and perhaps she would accept me. That was how it came about. She took the diamonds, and eloped with a married man two days afterwards."

As he told the story, the grossness of it all came over him, — the offense to the exquisite delicacy of the girl beside him.

"But I ought not to have told you this," he stammered.

"What?" she said dully. "About the woman? Oh, as if that mattered!" She turned from him sharply, putting the back of her hand against her lips as though to hide their quiver.

Then she burst out: "Oh, why did you tell me? Why? why? Oh, I wish you had not told me!" She shook from head to foot. "But it will make no dif-

ference! I will not let it make any difference. I am going to marry you. Only — *I never knew you!*"

Those most terrible words, those words with which Love destroys itself, came like a blow between the eyes. He grew very pale. "'Not make any difference'?" he repeated, blankly, "why, what difference could it make?"

She stopped crying, suddenly, and stood, panting, steadying herself by her hands upon his breast, and staring at him. There was something almost terrifying in this sudden pause and in her burning look.

"It 's the one thing," she said, "don't you see? that lasts. It is n't like — other things."

"But it was not I," he said, mechanically. "Not I, the man you — you thought you knew. It was a boy, twenty-three years ago. Amy, Amy! Twenty-three years ago!"

She did not listen; she kept repeating to herself: "It shall make no difference. I will not let it make any difference." Alas, it was not for her to say! The

difference was made; the jewel crushed under foot is no more a jewel; the rose thrown into the fire is no more a rose. The stained human soul is no more the innocent human soul.

"But you must listen to me, Amy," he said. "No, I will not speak until you are calm. Sit down. Look at me. Now, listen to what I have to say." He spoke slowly and gently, as one does to a terrified, unreasonable child.

"Dear, I had forgotten it. So little is it a part of my life that I had forgotten it. When I remembered it last night, it was with a sense of astonishment, a sense of pity for the mad boy who did it. I had no personal shame, — it seemed to belong to some one else, whom I watched with sorrow and indignation. I do not believe that to-day, more than twenty years afterwards, I have any business to think of it."

"Then why did you tell me?" she said wearily. "Oh, don't talk about it any more. I am going to forget it. Good-by. I am going upstairs. I have a headache. Good-by."

She let her hand slip listlessly out of his, and left him standing, blankly, his lips parted for another protest, and the flowers from her belt between his fingers.

V

As he went out past the drawing-room door, Mrs. Paul called to him : —

"Do come here a moment, Mr. West. Is n't Amy pretty in her wedding-dress ? You really must tell me what to do about something. There is a family" — and she entered upon a puzzling question of relief work, her forehead gathering into a frown, yet with her kind eyes denying the severe common-sense of her statement, that if a man will not work neither shall he eat.

"But you see we can't let the children go hungry," she ended.

The consideration of other people's weaknesses and wickedness gave William West time to get his breath ; he threw himself into the question with keen and intelligent sympathy. He pointed out this ; he suggested that ; he cleared the

puzzle out of Mrs. Paul's face, and all the time he was half deafened by a clamoring suspicion: "Have I been a fool? She will never forget it! It will always be between us. I 've been a cowardly fool."

"Well, that 's all settled," said Mrs. Paul, with an air of relief; "now tell me, what day shall I have Amy's things sent to the rectory? And shall I take the silver from the bank the day before you arrive? Is it safe to leave it at your house? I hate the responsibility of other people's silver!"

"Oh, certainly, yes," he answered, suddenly absent; and, with a curt good-by, left her.

Somehow or other, he hardly knew how, he got through the day. There was a service in the afternoon, and there were other people's affairs and sorrows to remember; fortunately, there always is duty for us poor human creatures as a refuge from our thoughts! Duties to be done saved William West from desperately going back to Amy to explain. For he was guilty of the impulse of "expla-

nation," the babble with which the weak mind is forever annotating its remarks or its opinions.

Well, the day passed. In spite of a craving to see Amy that was almost agonizing, he held on to his common-sense, and left her to herself. In the evening, his lawyer came in, bringing some papers in regard to certain property which it was the minister's intention to make over to his wife, and the looking these over, and the business talk, was a relief to him. He began to feel that he had taken Amy's perturbation much too seriously; it would be all right; she would see things clearly when the first dismay had passed. He thought, tenderly, that he must not let her feel any regret for having for a moment shown him her pain at what he had told her. Her pain was only part of her exquisite goodness, that goodness which held her, remote and lovely, like some pure and luminous star, so far above the sordid meannesses and wickednesses of common life that she could not understand them; perhaps even she could not pity them. Only

the sinlessness which was in all points tempted like as we are can at once understand and pity; his thought, chastened and passionate, fled back to his Master for comfort, — yet there was no reproach of Amy in his mind.

It must have been after ten, as he and Mr. Woodhouse sat before the broad writing-table, with the litter of papers and memoranda before them, that John Paul suddenly burst into the room.

The senior warden's strong, kind face was flushed; he was plainly profoundly disturbed and upset.

"West" — he said explosively, and stopped, seeing that they were not alone. "My dear fellow," he began again, stammering with agitation, "can I see you a moment? A matter of business, Woodhouse, if you don't mind. Can we go into another room, West?"

But the lawyer protested that he was just about to go home. "I have married a wife; you 'll see how it is yourself, Billy, pretty soon! Lois allows me twenty minutes leeway of the hour I name to get home, and if I 'm not back then, she

threatens to send a policeman after me. Good-night. Good-night, John." And he went whistling off into the night.

The minister had not spoken.

"Look here," John Paul said, as the front door banged, "what under the sun is this business? Good Lord, West, Amy's sent you a letter — Kate told me to break it to you, but I — confound it, man — go and read it. The girl's crazy. Go and read it. What are we going to do?"

Without a word William West took the letter and read it, standing facing Mr. Paul. ("It looked," John Paul told his wife afterwards, "as though he died, then and there.")

"You were right to tell me — only please — please don't make me marry you. I cannot. I could never forget. If it were anything else — anything else — it would be different; but theft — oh, how cruel I am to say that! but I cannot marry you. There's no use talking about forgiveness. I don't want you to forgive me. I want you to hate me; then you

will suffer less. Hate me. I'm not worth anything else. I'm going home to-morrow. It can be said I am ill, and the wedding is put off. I am ill; it won't be a lie. Please don't ask to see me. I cannot see you. Forgive me. A."

William West sat down, folding the letter between his fingers.

"There 's nothing to be said." He spoke very quietly. Then he opened the letter again, and looked down at it.

"West, for God's sake," John Paul entreated him; "listen, man! don't take it like that. The girl is out of her mind. Here, pull yourself together! It 's a passing whim; you will bring her to her senses as soon as you see her."

"She will not see me," he said. As he spoke his eye caught the headlines of the deed of gift, and he read them absently: —

"This Indenture *made this* —— *day of* ——, *Anno Domini* 18—, *Witnesseth: that William West, the grantor, for divers good and valuable considerations to him moving,*

has, and by these presents does give, grant, and convey" —

The fold in the deed hid the rest.

"She's got to see you!" John Paul said angrily. "What's the matter with her? Is she out of her senses? All I know is what Kate told me. She asked me to bring you the letter. She said Amy had broken her engagement. You could have knocked me over with a straw. She wouldn't give any reasons. But I'm touched by this business. If a woman in my household suddenly forgets honor and common decency, I'm touched by it! Unless you've given her cause?"

He walked up and down, breathing hard, his hands thrust into his pockets, jingling his latchkeys for the mere relief of doing something. William West put the little note into his pocket.

"I've given her cause," he said.

His senior warden stopped in front of him, and looked at him critically. "You're lying to me. I know you! It's a girl's whim, and I'm touched by it, I tell you.

She's a member of my family. I shall see her (she would n't see me before I started here), and straighten this business out. Kate is nearly dead with it. My wife looked like a ghost when she came and told me — and the wedding day after to-morrow! No; I'm going to straighten this thing out. What I want you to do is to tell me, man to man, what started it?"

"Amy is perfectly justified," William West said dully. "I told her this morning that I had committed a forgery."

"A — ?" John Paul sat down, his mouth open, his plump hands on his knees, his eyes starting from his head.

"You are out of your mind!"

William West laughed shortly.

"I think, perhaps, I was when I told her. Yes; I was a fool. It was twenty-three years ago; I had just about forgotten it. When I remembered, I told her. It was too much for her. She is right to stop now. If she can throw me over, thank Heaven she has done so!"

The bitterness of it burst out in that last sentence. Then, quietly, he told

Amy's cousin the story of that long-buried youth. When it was done, John Paul said huskily: —

"West, I don't know what to think of your telling her; but I know what to think of you. And I know what to think of Amy."

William West said nothing; he took the little note out of his pocket and turned it over and over.

("He seemed to go to pieces before my eyes," John Paul told his wife. "I tell you, Kate, I saw him lose his moral grip! Poor West — poor fellow!")

Mr. Paul sat helplessly looking at his clergyman, until he had a sense of indecency in watching the suffering of this silent human creature. Then he said vaguely: —

"I suppose you want me to clear out? But just tell me; what do you want me to do?"

"Nothing."

"But don't you mean to make any effort to bring her to her senses?" burst out the other.

"There's nothing to be done," the

lover said. "It's over — don't you see?"

"It's not over," insisted Amy's cousin; "I shall see her; this thing can't go on. I'll send for you; you are well rid of her; it will be all right, I" — Storming and protesting and contradicting himself, he went out of the rectory, scarcely noticing that his host saw him to the door, and let him out, in absolute silence.

Then William West went back and locked himself into his library.

VI

The senior warden of St. James was wrong when he said that his minister lost his moral grip. There was, no doubt, a time of upheaval and shock, a staggering under a calamity which seemed to have no moral excuse, to be only a senseless shattering of a human life.

But he got his balance again. He made no effort to see Amy. This was partly to spare her, and partly from a sense of the futility of argument; the

thing was done; if she married him ten times over, it would not be the same. As she said, she had never known him; and perhaps he had never known her. But, for that matter, who of us knows the other? The question is, is it worth while to try to attain, or to bestow, such knowledge? Gossip, of course, had run riot when it was known that he had been jilted; but gossip, after it reaches a certain point of insult and falsehood, becomes a source of amusement to its victims. West, with his delicate sense of humor, found other people's opinions of his sufferings not without interest. It being nobody's business but his own, only three people besides Miss Townsend and himself knew the facts — the Pauls and his own lawyer; so no light was thrown upon the subject to Mercer, which seethed and bubbled, and made itself wildly ludicrous. The minister went away after that first fury of parish excitement was over, and came back in four months, quite brown, with a good appetite, and several very interesting pieces of tapestry which he had picked

up on the other side. He dined a little less frequently at the Pauls', and was never once reminded that Mrs. Paul had been instrumental in bringing him to Mercer.

He became, perhaps, a little more of a man's man; a little more impatient with his feminine correspondents; a little less polite to the old ladies, who thought him less good-looking "since his disappointment." But he took a deep and passionate hold upon affairs; the conditions of labor, the hideous problems of vice; the reformation of the sordid politics of the small city in which he lived, — these things filled his life. Were they enough? Who knows! We make husks into bread when the soul starves.

As for Amy, that is another story.

. . . . . .

It was nearly two years after this that John Paul walked home one night with Mr. Woodhouse, who was a fellow vestryman of St. James. They had been sitting smoking by William West's fireside, talking over a strike which was on in one of the mills, where it seemed as though

the rights lay with the strikers; a fact which these gentlemen believed to be unusual. It was nearly midnight when they left the rectory and went along the empty, echoing street together.

"It strikes me," said Mr. Paul, "that you had n't much to say for yourself to-night, Woodhouse. You 're the canniest fellow about giving an opinion! Did n't you want to commit yourself?"

"I have n't any opinion yet," said the other man slowly; "and, somehow, I got to thinking — I say, John, after all, what do you make of West's telling Miss Townsend that matter?"

"I think she did n't know which side her bread was buttered," John Paul said gruffly.

"Oh, that 's another question," the lawyer said. "I think almost any woman is too good for almost any man. I wonder they don't all think better of it at the last moment, and throw us over!"

"How long have you been married, Gifford?" the older man inquired cynically. "I 'll tell you what Kate says: Kate says if Amy could throw him over,

she ought to have had the chance to. So she thinks West ought to have told her."

"That's like saying, if there is a chance of breaking your neck by taking some preposterous leap, take it," the lawyer commented. "But as I look back at it now, and see how it has aged Billy, and — well, hardened him a little, I think — it seems such an unnecessary calamity; such a blunder! And yet" —

"Kate has views about heredity, and all that sort of thing," Mr. Paul explained. "She says a woman has a right to say her children shan't have a — shady character for a father. That was too much for me; I don't generally contradict my Boss; it is n't peaceful. But that was too much for me! Billy West shady! I gave my wife a piece of my mind. I tell you, Woodhouse, women are hard."

"Well, but there 's something in that," the lawyer protested. "A woman has not only a right, but a duty, to think of her children, and a possible moral taint" —

"Moral grandmother!" John Paul broke in; "West is one man in a hundred. I think he 's well rid of Amy: I told him so at the time. Why, look here; a man who has not repented of his sin has no inclination to confess it. And, having repented and made reparation, confession becomes a mere matter of expediency. Why, good heavens, Gifford! is there to be no escape from sin? What 's all this talk about forgiveness mean, if we 've got to rake up the past and agonize over it as long as we live? Is n't there any statute of limitation in things spiritual? I don't believe any large mind dwells on its sins, any more than on its virtues! And yet," he ended, suddenly cooling, "I swear it is a difficult question, the telling or not telling the girl you are going to marry."

"If you bring it down to expediency, it 's simple enough," Gifford Woodhouse said; "it was obviously inexpedient. Even if she had married him, and simply remembered, would either of them have been any better off? Would any end

have been subserved by putting such painful knowledge on her conscience as well as his own? It was not as though there was a lady 'with nine small children and one at the breast' somewhere round the corner in the Past, who might turn up some day. That sort of sin affects the relation of the man and woman, and it may be simple prudence to confess. Though I think there is a question, even there. But in this case expediency, you might even call it unselfishness, would make him hold his tongue. The only thing is, perhaps there is something higher than expediency?"

They had reached Mr. Paul's door; he pitched his cigar into the street and pulled out his keys, shaking them on the end of their chain.

"You mean, abstractly, is it right or wrong, under circumstances like these, where no third person is to be cleared or benefited, to tell? Does honor demand confession?"

"Yes," said the vestryman; "was it a duty to speak, or a duty to be silent?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Was West a fool or a saint?" insisted the younger man.

"I 'll be hanged if I know," said the senior warden.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

I

THE Rev. Silas Eaton was dead. It was May, and the little orchard behind the parsonage was like a white and perfumed cloak flung on the shoulder of a bare hillside which was, all the rest of it, rocky pasture. Under the trees, and in the shelter of the stone walls, the grass was growing green. The apple blossoms were just beginning to fall; in any breath of wind single petals, white, stained outside with crimson, came down in flurries, like gusts of warm and aromatic snow. There was a stir of life everywhere. In the parsonage garden crown imperials had pushed their strong stalks through the damp earth, and peonies were reaching up long slender arms, each with its red curled fist of leaves, reluctant to expand until certain of the

sun. The ground was spongy beneath the foot, and there were small springs bubbling up under every winter-bleached tuft of last year's grass. The air, full of the scent of earth and growing things, was warm and sweet, yet with an edge of cold — the sword of frost in a velvet scabbard.

Life — life: and in the upper chamber of the parsonage the master lay dead.

One of the children had put a bunch of apple blossoms on the table at the head of the bed. They were not appropriate — the soft, rosy flowers beside the hard face there on the pillow; the face with its thatch of gray hair over the narrow, domelike brow, seamed and cut with wrinkles; the anxious, melancholy lips set in such icy and eternal indifference — the face of the religious egotist, stamped with inexorable sincerity, stern and cold and mean. Not a father's face. But his daughter had put her handful of snowy flowers on the pine table, their little gnarled black stems thrust tightly down into a tumbler of water. And then she went tiptoeing out of the silent room.

She heard her mother's little, light voice downstairs in the parlor, and Elder Barnes's low, respectful murmur in response. They were "making the arrangements." Esther's heart stood still, not with grief, but with misery at the strangeness of it all — her silent, meek, obedient mother saying what should or what should not happen to — father!

"And, Mr. Barnes, if it will not be a trouble, will you find out for me how much it would cost to send a telegram to my brother in Mercer?"

Esther, leaning over the banisters in the upper hall, opened her lips with astonishment. A telegram! It gave the child a sense of the dreadful importance of this May day as nothing else had done. The thought of the expense of it came next, sobering that curious sense of elation which is part of bereavement.

"Mother ought n't to do that. It will cost — oh, it will cost at least a dollar!"

This fifteen-year old Esther had a certain grim practicality, born of a childhood in a minister's family on five hun-

dred dollars a year. A dollar! And that uncle in Mercer, whom she had never seen, who had quarreled with her mother because she married her father, and who was so rich and powerful (according to a newspaper paragraph she had once read) — this uncle, who had had no connection with them in all these years — what was the use of wasting a dollar in telegraphing him? She meant to say so; and yet, when she went downstairs, after Elder Barnes had gone, and found her little mother standing at the window, looking blankly out at the garden, there was something in the mild, faded face that kept the girl silent. She came up and put her strong young arm about her, and kissed her softly.

"Mother, won't you lie down?"

"No, dear; I am not tired. Mr. Barnes has been very kind in telling me what must be done. I do hope everything will be as — *he* would wish."

They did not speak for a little while, and then Esther said, in a low voice, "Mother, I don't want to worry you, and — and perhaps it 's very soon to speak of

it, but have you thought at all of what is going to become of us?"

Her mother put up her hand with a sort of shiver. "No, no; not yet. We must n't talk of that yet. Oh, Esther, he is dead! Poor Silas — poor Silas!" She caught her breath like a child, and looked up at her tall daughter in a frightened way.

Esther nodded and cried a little; then she wiped her eyes, and said, hesitating: "You 're going to get a crêpe veil, are n't you, mother, and a black dress? And I think I ought to have a black dress."

"We have n't any money for new clothes, Essie," Mrs. Eaton answered tremulously.

"But I think we ought to wear black," Esther protested. "It is n't proper not to."

The other sighed with anxiety. "I don't see how we can. He would not wish us to waste the money."

They were very intimate, these two; for each had found the other a shelter from the fierce integrity which had ruled the family life. And now instinctively

they nestled together, panting and chirping like two frightened birds, and saying to each other, "*He* would wish this, or that."

But he was dead, and the face of life was suddenly changed to them both. The withdrawal of the dominant righteous will of husband and father made an abrupt silence in their lives — a silence which was as overwhelming in its way as grief. To the mother it was as though having been borne helplessly along on some powerful arm, she had been suddenly set down on her own feet, and bidden to lead and carry others. Esther's frightened question, "What is going to become of us?" echoed in her ears like a crash of bewildering sound. She had no answer; all she knew was that she must take care of the children; work for them; fight for them — poor little weak creature! — if necessary. She was thirty-five, this mother, but she looked much older. Once she must have been pretty; one knew that by the startled softness of her hazel eyes and the delicately cut pale lips; but her forehead, rounded like

a child's, was worn and full of lines, and her whole expression so timid and anxious and deprecating that one only thought of what her life must have been to cut so deep a stamp on such gentle and vague material. It had been, since her marriage, a very uneventful life, its keenest excitement the making both ends meet on her husband's salary. Before that there had, indeed, been the keen and exciting experience of marrying in opposition to her father's command, and being practically disowned by her people. She was Lydia Blair, a girl of good family, gentle and dutiful, as girls were expected to be thirty years ago — one of those pleasant girls who let their elders and betters think for them, and are loved as one loves comfortable and inanimate things. And then, suddenly, had appeared this harsh, fiery, narrow New England minister, of another denomination, of another temperament — for that matter, of another class; and she had developed a will of her own and married him. Why? Everybody who knew her asked, "Why?" Perhaps afterwards she

herself asked why — afterwards, when he became so intent upon saving his own soul that he had no time to win his children's love or to make love to his wife. By the time he came to die, very likely he had forgotten he ever had made love to her. He called her "Mrs. Eaton," and he was as used to her as he was to his battered old desk or his worn Bible. But when he came to die, he lay in his bed and watched her as he had not done these fifteen years; and once he said, when she brought him his medicine, "You 've been a good wife, Mrs. Eaton;" and once, "You 're very kind, Lily." But this was at the end, and the doctor said his mind was wandering. And then the end had come, in the spring night, towards dawn; and now he was lying still, as indifferent to the soft weather, the shower of apple blossoms, the two children whispering about the house, the wife staring, dry-eyed, out into the sunshine — as indifferent as he always had been.

Well, well; he was a good man, they said; and now he had gone to find the

God whom he had defamed and vilified under the name of religion, imputing to Him meanness and cruelty and revenge — the passions of his own poor human nature.

And may that God have mercy on his soul!

II

Robert Blair came into the dining-room, holding the "dollar telegram" in his hand. His wife looked up at him, smiling.

"It is really shameful the way business pursues you! I am going to tell Samuel to burn all dispatches that come here. Your office is the place for those horrid yellow papers."

"It isn't business this time, Nellie; it's death."

"Oh, Robert!"

"Oh," he hastened to explain, "it's nothing that touches us. My sister Lydia's husband is dead. You have heard me speak of my sister Lydia, haven't you? It was long before your day, you baby, that she married him.

Ah, well, what a pretty girl she was!" He sat down, shook his head when the man offered him some soup, and opened his napkin thoughtfully. "Well, he's dead. He was a most objectionable person" —

Mrs. Blair looked at the butler's back as he stood at the sideboard, and raised her eyebrows; but her husband went on, a wrinkle like a cut deepening on his forehead: —

"My father forbade it — did I never tell you about it? — but Lydia, who had always been a nonentity, suddenly acquired a will, and married him. My father never forgave her. She evidently did n't care for any affection that did n't include him, and cut herself off from all of us. Of course I 'm sorry for her now; but I don't feel that I have anything to reproach myself with." He tapped the table with impatient fingers, and told the butler that he did n't want his claret *boiled.* "Have n't you any sense, Samuel? You 're a perfect fool about wine; here, throw that out of the window, and get me a fresh bottle!"

Mrs. Blair was a beautiful young woman, who, two years before, had married this irascible, successful, dogmatic man, and (so Mercer said) could wind him round any one of her pretty jeweled fingers whenever she wanted to. He certainly was very much in love — and so was she, though her particular world never believed it, alleging that she was not indifferent to the loaves and fishes.

But the fact was Mrs. Blair took the loaves and fishes with a childlike delight which meant appreciation, certainly, but not avarice. She enjoyed her wealth, and her life, and herself, immensely and openly; and that was her charm to her husband, a man immersed in large affairs, sagacious, powerful, and without imagination. He was a cultivated man, because his forbears had been educated people, of sober, comfortable wealth; hence he had gone to college, like other young men of his class, and had traveled, and had acquired an intellectual, or rather a commercial knowledge of Art. But, until he married, every instinct was for power, and the making of money. After

that, though the guiding principle remained the same, a sense of beauty did awaken in him. He never flagged in his fierce and joyous and cruel passion for getting; but he delighted in his wife — perhaps as one of his own enormous machines might have delighted in a ray of sunlight dancing across its steel shafts, and flickering through the thunderous whir of its driving-wheel. He loaded the girl he married with every luxury; almost immediately she found she had nothing left to desire — from dogs to diamonds, houses, yachts, or pictures. She, poor child, realized no deprivation in seeing every wish fulfilled, and thought herself the luckiest and the happiest woman in the world. Her money, combined with a good deal of common-sense, gave her the power to interfere helpfully in the lives of less fortunate people. She called it Philanthropy, and found playing Providence to the halt, the maimed, and the blind a really keen interest. Her impulse was always to "manage"; and so, when her husband, frowning, and perhaps a little less satisfied with himself than usual,

began to talk about his sister's affairs, Mrs. Blair was instantly interested.

"Of course her husband's death will make a difference in her income?" she said, as they went upstairs to the library. "A country minister's salary does n't amount to much anyhow; but" —

"Well, she made her bed," he interrupted sharply; "she ought to be willing to lie in it!"

"Oh, yes, of course; but now the man is dead, it 's different. I know you want to do something for her, you are so generous."

He pulled her pretty ear at that, and told her she was a flattering little humbug. "What do you want, diplomat? You 'll bankrupt me yet. Am I to build a palace for Lily? Look here, I wrote that West Virginia college president today and told him I 'd give him the money he wanted. It 's all your doing, but I get the name of a great educator."

"Oh, Robert, how good you are! I think that ought to silence the people that say you 'grind the face of the poor.' I saw that in the paper to-day. Beasts!

and you are so generous! I tell you what I want: I want you to have them come here, your sister and the children" —

"You angel!" he said. "No; that's dangerous. We might n't like the brats. The boy's name is Silas. I don't think I could stand a cub named Silas. But the girl would n't be so bad. As for Lily (we used to call her Lily when she was a girl), she is one of those gentle, colorless women, all virtue and no opinions, whom anybody could live with. Rather a fool, you know. But we 'll have them come and make us a visit, if it won't bore you. If we like it, we can prolong it. Anyhow, I 'll see that poor Lil has a decent income. You know, my father did n't leave her a cent. The old gentleman said he would n't have 'that hell-fire Presbyterian use any of his money for his damned heathen!' But I 'll look after her now."

Thus it was that a home was prepared for Silas Eaton's widow; the offer of it came the day after the funeral, when she sat down to face the future. She had

gone over her assets, in her halting, feminine way, counting up the dollars on her fingers, and subtracting the debts with a stubby lead-pencil on the back of an old envelope; and she had discovered that when all the expenses of the funeral were paid she would have in the bank one hundred and seventy-five dollars. If she could manage to sell her husband's very limited library, she might add a few dollars to that sum; but very few.

One hundred and seventy-five dollars! She must go to some city, and go to work, so that Silas and Esther might be educated. She had got as far as that when her brother's letter came. He would have come himself, he said, but was detained by an annoying strike in one of his rolling-mills, and so wrote to ask her to come, with the children, and visit him for a little while; "then we 'll see what can be done; but don't worry about ways and means. I will see to all that."

She read the straightforward, kindly words, her heart beating so she could scarcely breathe. Then she covered her

face with her hands, and trembled with excitement and relief. "Oh," she said, "the children won't be poor! Robert will take care of us."

III

When Mrs. Eaton went to Mercer, the change in her life was absolute and bewildering. Robert Blair's enormous wealth was, at first, simply not to be realized. The subdued and refined magnificence of the house conveyed nothing to his sister's mind, because she had no standard of value. The pictures and tapestries implied not money, but only beauty and joy, for she had never dreamed of buying anything but food and clothes; so how could she guess that all the money of all her sixteen years on a minister's salary would not have purchased, say, the small misty square of canvas that held in one corner a wonderful and noble and peasant name?

The first night in the great wainscoted dining-room, with a man bringing unknown dishes to her elbow, with candles

shining on elaborate and useless pieces of silver, with the glow of firelight flickering out from under a superb chimney-piece of Mexican marble, and dancing about the stately and dignified room — the beauty and the graciousness and the wonder of it was an overwhelming experience, though she had not the dimmest idea of the fortune it represented — a fortune notorious and envied the land over. That she had had no share in it until now did not wound her in the least; she was grateful for the warmth and the comfort and the kindness, now they had come; she never harked back to the painful years of silence and forgetfulness.

Her brother and his wife watched her, amused and interested; her dazzled admiration of everything was half touching, half droll. But what a confession it was! Eleanor Blair realized this, and she said to herself, warmly, that she would make up to Robert's sister for the past. She was in her element in arranging her sister-in-law's future; she made a dozen plans for her in the first week; but her husband laughed and shook his head.

"Wait," he said; "time enough when we see how we get along."

But they got along very well. The children, after the first shy awkwardness had worn off, were really attractive. Silas, an eager brown-eyed boy of eleven, lovable in spite of his name, made artless and pretty love to his pretty aunt, who found him a delightful plaything. "The serious Esther," as her uncle called her, was a friendly little creature, when one came to know her; her common-sense commended her to Mr. Blair, and her dressmaking and her education were an immediate interest to her aunt.

So it came about that the visit was prolonged, and the project of a little establishment of her own for Mrs. Eaton gradually given up; at all events, for the present. It was very satisfactory as it was. The house was so big, they were not in the way; and Mrs. Eaton's mourning kept her in the background in regard to society — which "was just as well," Mrs. Blair admitted, smiling to herself — but it made no difference in her usefulness. She was really quite useful in one

way or another; she could write an intelligent note to a tradesman, or reply (by formula) to a begging letter; so, by and by, she was practically her sister-in-law's secretary, and certainly the Blairs had never had either a maid or a butler who could begin to arrange flowers for a dinner party as Mrs. Eaton did. She was silent, and rather vague, but always gentle, and ready and eager to fetch and carry for anybody. She so rarely expressed any opinion of her own, that when she did the two strong and good-natured people who made her life so easy for her could hardly take it seriously. She did, to be sure, decline to change her son's objectionable name, on the ground that it was his name, and so could not be changed; "and," Mrs. Blair complained once, "she won't let me send Esther to dancing-school. I asked her if she thought dancing was wrong, and she said, 'Oh, no; but Mr. Eaton did.' Is n't it funny?"

Robert Blair laughed, and said he would straighten that out. But, somehow, it was not straightened out. Esther

teased, and Mrs. Blair was just a little impatient and sarcastic. But Esther did not go to dancing-school.

"I 'm sorry to displease you, Eleanor," Mrs. Eaton said, shrinking as she spoke, like a frightened animal which expects a blow, "but — I can't allow it. Mr. Eaton would not have wished it."

Yet, negative as she seemed, the little quiet woman was keenly alive to the advantages of this full, rich life for the children, and, indeed, for herself. Mere rest was such a luxury to her, for she had lived and worked as only a country minister's wife must. So, to feel no anxiety, to have delicate food, to know the touch of fine linen, — in fact, to be comfortable, meant more to her than even her brother, enjoying his generosity towards her, could possibly imagine.

So life began for his sister and her children in Robert Blair's beautiful great house in the new part of Mercer, — the new part which is not offended by the sight of those great black chimneys roaring with sapphire and saffron flames, or belching monstrous coils of black smoke,

threaded with showers of sparks, — those chimneys and roofs which are not beautiful to look upon, but which have made the "new" part of Mercer possible. When Mrs. Eaton came to her brother's house, these unlovely foundations of his fortune were still for a month. There was a strike on, and Mercer was cleaner and quieter than it had been for many months, — in fact, than it had been since the last strike. The clang and clamor of the machine-shops, the scream of the steel saws biting into the living, glowing rails, the thunderous crash of plates being tested in the hot gloom of the foundries, had all stopped.

"And, oh dear me," said Mrs. Blair, "what a relief it is! Of course it 's very annoying to have them strike, and all that, but when one drives into town to get to the other side of the river, the noise is perfectly intolerable. And when the wind is in that direction, we can really hear the roar even out here."

She said this to her clergyman, who looked at her with a veiled sparkle of humor in his handsome eyes.

"So the puddlers shall starve to make a Mercer holiday," he said good-naturedly.

"If they choose to strike, they must take the consequences," she replied, with some spirit. "Besides, they are the most ungrateful creatures! Well, I 'm sure I don't know what we 're coming to!"

"Something may be coming to us," her visitor said, with a whimsical look, but he sighed, and got up to take his leave. His charming parishioner sighed too, prettily, and said with much feeling, —

"Of course, Mr. West, if there are any cases that need help, you 'll let me know."

"But, Nellie," said Mrs. Eaton, who had been sitting silent, as usual, and quite overlooked by the other two, "is there any use in helping the people who are in trouble because they are out of work, and yet not letting them go to work?"

Mrs. Blair laughed, in spite of herself, the protest was so unexpected, and so absurd, coming from this meek source. "My dear," she said, "you don't under-

stand; they can go to work if they want to."

"Well," Mrs. Eaton said anxiously, "I should think, either they are wrong, and so you should n't help them, or they are right, and they ought to get what they want."

Her sister stared at her, and then laughed again, greatly amused; but William West put on his glasses and gave her a keen look.

"Mrs. Eaton, don't you want to help us on the Organized Relief Association?"

"Yes, sir," said Lydia Eaton, "if there 's anything I can do."

"I don't want to steal your services away from any other parson," he said pleasantly. "I suppose you belong to Mr. Hudson's flock? You are a Presbyterian, of course?"

"No, sir, I am not," she said, the color rising in her face.

"Oh, then you do belong to me?" he said smiling.

"I 'm not an Episcopalian," she answered, with a frightened look.

"Then what on earth are you?" Mrs. Blair asked her, laughing.

"I 'm not — anything," she said, her voice trembling; "but, Eleanor, please don't speak of it. The children must not know it. Mr. Eaton would want them to be members of his church. So we must always go there."

There was an instant's awkward pause. Mrs. Blair looked very disapproving.

"Why, Lydia," she said, "do you mean you don't believe things? Why, I never had a doubt in my life!" she exclaimed, turning to the minister, who was silent.

Mrs. Eaton caught her breath, and looked at him too, her mild eyes full of pain. "Nobody ever asked me before. I am sorry, but I can't help it. The Bible says people go to hell; but God is good, so I don't believe the Bible. But Mr. Eaton would wish me to go to church."

The perfectly simple logic, so primitive as to stop at "the Bible says," was irresistibly funny; yet, to William West, infinitely touching. But he put the discussion aside quietly.

"So you will come on our committee?" he said. "We shall be glad to have you."

But when he went away he laughed a little to himself. "The iron heel of Edwards, I suppose. But how direct! Two and two make four. She is incapable of understanding that they sometimes make five."

But Mrs. Blair did not dismiss it so lightly. She was annoyed at the protest about the strikers, and that impelled her to straighten out Mrs. Eaton's religious beliefs. There was some irritation in her voice as she began, but she was in earnest, and stopped in the middle of "proofs" to tell Samuel to say she was "not at home."

"But, Eleanor, you are," Mrs. Eaton protested in a frightened way.

"My dear, that is a form of speech."

"But it makes Samuel tell a lie," she said nervously.

"Oh, Lily, don't be silly," Mrs. Blair said impatiently, and then jumped from hell to the strikers, — though, as it happened, the distance between them was

not so great after all. "Really, now, Lydia, I don't think you ought to speak as you did before Mr. West about the men. In the first place, business is n't philanthropy, and Robert can't give in to them. And in the second place, they are behaving outrageously! I should think you would have more loyalty to Robert than to seem to uphold them."

"I only meant" — Mrs. Eaton began breathlessly.

"Oh, my dear, you don't know what you mean," Mrs. Blair interrupted, laughing and good-natured again. "But just remember, will you, how kind Robert is? It seems to me he is always doing things for this ungrateful place. Look at the fountain in the square; that 's the last thing."

"But would n't the men rather have had running water in the tenements?" Mrs. Eaton said; "there are only hydrants down in the back yards."

However, as that first year in Mercer slipped by, there were very few such jars. The strike ended early in the fall, and there was nothing to call out any objec-

tionable opinion from Mrs. Eaton on that line.

"As for Lydia," Robert Blair said once, "you say 'go,' and she goeth. She has absolutely no will of her own."

This was, apparently, quite true. At all events, she had a genius for obedience, and a terror of responsibility. In the organized relief-work which Mrs. Blair's clergyman had proposed, obedience necessitated responsibility sometimes, and no one knew how the silent little creature suffered when she had to decide anything. But she did decide, usually with remarkable but very simple common-sense.

"And always on the supposition that two and two make four," Mr. West said to himself. He found her literalness a little aggravating just at first, but it was very diverting. He used to put on his glasses and watch her anxious face when she talked to him or received his orders (for such his requests or suggestions seemed to her); and he would ask her questions to draw out her astounding simplicity and directness of thought, and find her as refreshing as a child. She

used to sit up before him, saying, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and looking, with her startled eyes, like a little gray rabbit — for at the end of a year she took off her black dress, and wore instead soft grays that were very pretty and becoming. Her absolute literalness gave him much entertainment; but she never knew it. If she had guessed it, she would have been humbly glad to have been ridiculous, if it had amused him.

And so the first year and a half went by.

IV

It was the next winter that she asked her first question.

"Mr. West," she said, after making notes of this or that case that needed looking after (for she was practically visitor for St. James now), — "Mr. West, I would like to ask you something."

"Do, my dear Mrs. Eaton," he answered heartily.

"I would like to ask you," she said, her eyes fixed on his, to lose no shade of meaning in his reply, "do you think it

would be right for one person to live on money that another person had stolen?"

"If they knew it was stolen, of course not!" he said, smiling. "Has a pickpocket offered to go halves with you?"

"No, sir," she answered, so gravely that her listener's eyes twinkled. She made no explanation, but went away with a troubled look. The next time she saw him she had another question: —

"But suppose the person who lived on the money the other person stole needed it very much. Suppose they had n't anything else in the world. Suppose their children had n't anything else. Would it be their business to ask where it came from, Mr. West?"

"If it was their business to spend it, it would be," he told her. "Oh, my dear lady, the question of complicity is a pretty big one!" He sighed, thinking how little she realized that she was guessing at the riddle of the painful earth.

Again she went away, her face falling into lines of care. But William West never thought of the matter again. Indeed, he had no time to think of his quiet

almoner; those were alarming days in Mercer. The echoes of that storm which shook not only the town, but the very State and nation, are still rolling and muttering in the dark places of the land.

Another strike had begun in October. As for the deep and far-reaching causes, the economic and industrial necessities, the vast plans of organizations and trusts, they have no place in this statement of the way in which one ignorant woman regarded their effects — a woman living quietly in her brother's house, doing her work, expending her little charities, trying to relieve the dreadful misery of those wintry days, with about as much success as a child who plays beside some terrific torrent and tries to dam it with his tiny bank of twigs and pebbles. Robert Blair's sister had no economic or ethical theories; she had only an anguished heart at the suffering in that dreary mill town, a dreadful bewilderment at its contrast with the untouched luxury of her brother's house. That she should find a child in one of the tenements dying at its mother's barren breast, while her own

children fared sumptuously every day; that a miserable man should curse her because her brother was robbing him of work, and warmth, and decency, even, while she must bless that same brother for what he was giving her, was a dreadful puzzle. As she understood the situation, this misery existed because her brother would no longer give even fourteen cents an hour to human beings who had to stand half naked in the scorch of intense furnaces, reeking with sweat, taking a breathless moment to plunge waist deep into tanks of cold water; to men who worked where the crash of exploding slag or the accidental tipping of a ladle might mean death; to gaunt and stunted creatures, hollow-eyed, with bleared and sodden faces, whose incessant toil to keep alive had crushed out the look of manhood, and left them silent, hopeless, brutish, with only one certainty in their stupefied souls: "*men don't grow old in the mills.*" . . . That these things should be, while she was clothed in soft raiment bought by wealth which these desperate beings had helped to

create — meant to this ignorant woman that there was something wrong somewhere. It was not for her to say what or where. She had no ambition to reform the world. She did not protest against the "unearned increment," nor did she have views as to "buying labor in the cheapest market." She did not know anything about such phrases. The only thing that concerned her was whether she, living on her brother's money, had any part or lot in the suffering about her? She grew nervous and haggard and more distrait and literal than ever. She wished she dared lay her troubles before the wise, gentle, strong man who, to her, was all that was good and great. But it did not seem to her right to criticise her brother to his clergyman. She never realized how amusing her simplicity might be, laid up against the enormous complexity of the industrial question; to her it was only: "If Robert is rich, and does n't give his workmen enough to live on, are not the children and I stealing from the men in living on Robert's money?"

This little question, applied to the relations of capital and labor, is of course absurd; but she asked it all the same, this soft, negative, biddable creature. She had gone to take some food to a hungry household, and she went away burning with shame because she was not hungry! It had been a cold, bright November day; she went past one of the silent furnaces along the black cinder path to the river-bank, where the flat cones of slag were dumped; some of them were still slightly warm.

It was quiet enough here to think: After all, Robert's money did so much good; there was the great fountain in the square, and the hospital, and the free night school. And think of what he was doing for Essie and Silas! Oh, it surely was n't her business to ask why he cut the men's wages down!

There was a flare of sunset flushing the calm blue of the upper heavens, and in the river, running black and silent before her, a red glow smouldered and brightened. Behind her, and all along the opposite bank, the furnaces were still.

Oh, the misery of that black stillness! If only she could see again the monstrous sheets of flame, orange, and azure, bursting with a roar of sparks from under the dampers of the great chimneys. It would mean work and warmth and food to so many! By some unsuggested flash of memory the parsonage garden came swiftly to her mind. It must be lying chill in the wintry sunset; she could see the little house behind it, with its bare, clean poverty; she wished she were back in it again with the two children! The beauty and the luxury of her brother's house seemed suffocating and intolerable; and yet would it feed the strikers if she should starve? — the vision of her own destitution without her brother's money was appalling. She sat down on a piece of slag, a little faint at the thought. Just then, from down below her, on the great heap of refuse, she heard voices.

"Come farther up; they 're hotter higher up," a woman said shrilly.

Then a miserable little group came clambering over the great cones of cool-

ing slag, and a child cried out joyously, "This here one 's hot, mammy!"

The woman, catching sight of Robert Blair's sister, though not recognizing her, said harshly: —

"You bet hangman Blair has a fire in his house to-day. Well, thank God, he ain't made no cut in slag, yet; we can get a bit of warmth here. I wish he may freeze in his bed!"

Lydia Eaton answered, stammering and incoherent, something about the cold weather; and then, she was so overstrained and nervous, she burst out crying. "Oh, won't you please let me give you this?" she said, and put some money into the woman's hand.

She went away, stumbling, because her eyes were blurred with tears, and saying to herself, —

"What *shall* I do?"

She almost ran into Mr. West on Baker Street, and stopped abruptly, putting her hands on his arm, and, in her agitation, shaking it violently, her whole face convulsed and terrified.

"Tell me — you know; you are good:

whose fault is it? Robert's — for all — this?"

He understood instantly, and was very gentle with her.

"My dear Mrs. Eaton, that is a very big question. It is n't any one man's fault. It seems strange, but the weather in India may be the reason we are all so wretched in Mercer. Your brother may be forced to make this cut by great laws, which, perhaps, you cannot understand."

"But *we* go on being warm," she said, "and it is cold. Oh, those little children had to get warm on the slag! Oh, sir, I don't believe the Saviour would have been warm while the children were cold!"

She looked at him passionately, abruptly applying the precepts of the Founder of his religion.

"Ah, well, you know," William West said kindly, "this whole matter is so enormously complicated" — And then he stammered a little, for, after all, how could he explain to this poor little frightened, ignorant soul that we have learned

how injurious to the race would be the literal application of the logic of the Sermon on the Mount? Nowadays the disciple is wiser than his master, and the servant more prudent than his Lord; we know that to feed the five thousand with loaves and fishes, without receiving some equivalent, would be to pauperize them. But of course Mrs. Eaton could not be made to understand that. The clergyman quieted her, somehow; perhaps just by his gentle pitifulness; or else her reverence for him silenced her. She did not ask him any more questions; and there was no one else to ask, except her brother, and just now it would have been hard to find the chance to ask Robert Blair anything.

The strike had slowly involved all the mills owned by a syndicate of which he was chairman. He had to go to South Bend, where the great smelting furnaces are; he was mobbed there, though with no worse results than the unpleasantness of eggs and cabbage stalks; still, the wickedness of those dreadful creatures was something too awful, Mrs. Blair said,

crying with anger and fright over the newspaper account. At still another mill town a ghastly box reached him, labeled: "Starved by the Blair syndicate." Robert Blair paled and sickened at its contents, but he swore under his breath: "Let them starve their brats, if they want to; it is n't my business. There 's work for them if they want it; but the curs would rather loaf. This country can go to the devil before I 'll give in to them!"

He did not get back to Mercer until December. "I would n't let the fools keep me from you on Christmas," he told his wife savagely, and caught her in his arms with a sort of rage. "Were you very lonely? You 've been nervous — I can see it in your face. You are paler!" He ground his teeth; that those brutes should have made her paler!

"Of course I was lonely," she said, smiling, though her eyes were bright with tears, "and I 've been frightened almost to death about you, too. Oh, that mob!"

"You little goose; did n't I tell you

there was no danger? I always had two detectives. But I used to get anxious about you. I telegraphed the mayor to detail an officer to be always about the house. Heaven knows what 's going to be the end of this business, Nell! Well, sweetheart, may I have some dinner, or must I go and dress first?"

"No. You 're dreadfully dusty, but I can't lose sight of you for a moment," she said gayly. "Robert, I should have died if you had n't been at home for Christmas!"

His sister and the children met him at the dining-room door — Silas, capering about with delight; Esther, prettier than ever, coming to hang on his arm, and rub her cheek against his shoulder, and say how glad she was to see him.

"Robert, it 's perfectly disgusting," Mrs. Blair complained, "but a delegation insists upon seeing you to-night; they are coming about eight."

"Oh, confound it!" he said frowning; "the strike, of course? A lot of parsons meddling with what they know nothing about."

"There are parsons, I suppose," she said, "but the mayor is coming. Do get rid of them as soon as you can, so that I may have a little of you."

She looked so pretty as she sat at the head of her table, beseeching him, that he declared he would kick the delegation out if they stayed over ten minutes; then he tossed a small white velvet box across the roses in the big silver bowl in the middle of the table, and watched her flash of joy as she opened it.

"It seems to me I have some more boxes, somewhere," he said good-humoredly. "There, Essie! if your aunt Eleanor had packed me off to get into my dress-suit, I would n't have found this one in my pocket. Lydia, you sober old lady, can you wear that? As for you, Silas, you don't want any gewgaws, do you? We fellows think more of a bit of paper with three figures on it, hey?"

"There! there 's the bell. It 's your horrid delegation," Mrs. Blair cried. "Just let them wait till you finish dinner. And do get rid of them quickly. Mr. Hudson, Lydia's minister, will be

there; tell him to wait a minute when the others have gone. I want to speak to him."

"I thought little Hudson had more sense," Robert Blair grumbled, rising and going into the library to meet a dozen of his fellow-citizens, some of them men with grave and startled faces, who from pity for the three thousand fools who were turning Mercer upside down, and from good-humored interest in the affairs of their powerful townsman, were beginning to feel the sting of personal alarm about their own concerns.

These men were saying to each other what the newspapers had been saying for two months, that Robert Blair, for vanity or obstinacy or greed, was bringing alarming disaster not merely upon a few thousand desperate and hungry and unreasonable puddlers, but upon the respectable well-to-do business population of his city.

"And he's got to stop it!" the mayor said angrily.

"It would be a good job if somebody would blow him up with dynamite," said

the Baptist deacon, who was the wealthiest merchant in town. "He'll swamp us all, if we don't look out."

As for the clergyman, he looked very miserable, for he had the expenses of his church and his own salary in mind, and between offending Mr. Blair and not protesting against the continuance of the strike, the poor little man was between the devil and the deep sea.

"Gentlemen," said Robert Blair, calm and hard ("as nails," the Baptist deacon said), "I appreciate the honor of your call, and I hope I have listened with proper courtesy and patience to what you had to say; but allow me to call your attention to certain facts which seem to contradict your assertions that you suspect that I am not acting for the public good in this matter of the strike. Mr. Mayor, if my wealth had been gained by the subversion of law and order, as you suggest, I am sure you could not have accepted any of it for your campaign — ah — *expenses*. For you, Mr. Davis, a church member, a deacon, if I mistake not, I need only remind you of your will-

ingness to borrow, I will not say how many thousands, as the basis of your most successful business (though I would not be thought to underrate your own prudence and economy in paying your women clerks a little less than they can live on). And as for my worthy friend here, the Rev. Mr. Hudson, if my money were, as he has so delicately implied, 'blood-money,' I cannot think he would have accepted the contribution I had the privilege of making towards the alterations of his church. Gentlemen, you have felt it your duty to remonstrate with me upon my way of making money; so long as you are content to spend that money, I cannot believe that your remonstrances are based upon anything else than the inconvenience to yourselves of certain exigencies which I deeply regret, but which result from methods which commend themselves to me, and which, I observe, you apply in your own concerns: you all pay as little as you can for what you want; I pay as little as I can for labor. For your particular request that I submit to the demands of

the strikers, I can only say that when Mr. Davis will give away in charity the fortune built upon the outcome of those methods; when his honor the Mayor will refund the — ah — *expenses* of his recent successful campaign and call it conscience-money; when the Rev. Mr. Hudson will give up improving his church — in fact, when you will all consent to buy your shirts or your potatoes in the dearest market — I will consent to alter the methods whereby I have had the honor of serving you. We will all reduce together. When we can do that, I will recognize a moral issue, as Mr. Hudson so admirably expresses it. Until then I will try to mind my own business. If it were not perhaps discourteous, I would recommend a like course of action to this committee. Gentlemen, I bid you good-evening."

He was pale with rage. He forgot his wife's message to the minister; he bowed, and stood with folded arms watching the withdrawal of the humiliated and angry delegation, "with their tails between their legs," the little clergy-

man said to himself, stung by the impudent injustice of it all.

Mr. Blair went into the drawing-room, breathing hard with the restraint he had put upon himself, for his coldly insolent words had been no outlet to his anger. "Don't talk about it," he said violently. "I won't hear another word on the subject. Nell, I thought that little Hudson was not entirely a jackass, though he is a parson; he had the impertinence to say that 'Brother West' agreed with him. I don't believe it! But if it 's true, why, then, West is a meddling idiot, like all the rest of these damned self-seeking philanthropists."

"Robert, *dear!* the children," murmured Mrs. Blair nervously.

His face was dully red, and his blue, fierce eyes cut like knives; one felt an unspoken epithet applied to the children, who watched him furtively, with frightened glances, and moved about awkwardly, speaking to each other in undertones. A moment before, everything had been full of charm and graciousness; their pretty aunt sat, indolent and grace-

ful, on a yellow sofa, leaning back against some ivory-satin cushions, with a great yellow-shaded lamp shining down on her delicate dark beauty; the flicker of the fire behind the sparkling brass dogs went leaping softly about the room, glowing on the walls, which were covered above the white wainscoting with yellow damask, on which the candle-light from the high sconces fell with a yellow shine; everything was golden and bright and rich, and the warm still air was delicate with the scent of violets. Then into it burst this violent and angry presence.

There is no embarrassment quite like the embarrassment of listening to a person for whom one has a regard making a fool of himself. Nobody spoke. Robert Blair tramped up and down, kicked a little gilded stool half across the room, caught his foot in a rug, stumbled, and then swore. Mrs. Blair's fox-terrier, Pat, shrunk under a table and looked at him, trembling.

"Silas," said Mrs. Eaton, "you and Esther must go upstairs."

"The trouble is," said her brother to

his wife, "these men don't know what they are talking about; they don't know anything about the market; they don't know anything about the necessities of trade; all they know is their dividends; if *they* were cut, there 'd be a howl! But they presume to dictate to us; to tell us the money is blood-money; all the same, they are ready enough to spend it on their own carcasses!"

Mrs. Eaton had closed the door on her children, and came and stood by a little silver-cluttered table, under the big yellow lamp. "I think Robert is quite right," she said.

The approval of this mild creature was like an edge laid against the tense thread of Robert Blair's anger. He burst into a laugh.

"Bless your heart, Lydia, I did n't know you were in the room. Well, my dear, I 'm glad you approve of me."

"I don't, brother."

"Oh, you don't? Where are the chicks? Sent them out of the room because I used bad words? Well, I ought n't to swear in the drawing-room, that 's a fact.

Place aux Dames! But after all, I only dropped the '*place.*'"

"Oh!" his wife said; and then, "you are very naughty;" and pouted, and pulled him down on his knees beside her.

"I thought it was very natural to be angry at the rug," Mrs. Eaton said breathlessly; "I've often felt like speaking that way myself"—

"Do, Lydia, do!" Mr. Blair interrupted, with a laugh.

"—but Mr. Eaton would never have allowed the children to hear, and"—

"Come, now! Have n't I apologized? Don't rub it in. I'll give you something extra to put in the plate on Sunday, because I did pitch into your man Hudson like the devil! I told him so long as he spent 'blood-money' for his darned improvements, he could n't reproach me for earning it."

"Oh," Lydia Eaton said, her hands squeezed together,—"oh, no! He is quite different from—me. It is *you* who are spending the—blood-money on the improvements. If he were spending it

on himself, like — like me, it would be different."

Her brother looked up at her from his footstool at his wife's feet, first amused, and then bored.

"My dear Lily, I 'm sure I don't know what you are talking about. I 'm sorry if I stepped on your toes about your parson. He means well. Only he is a parson, so I suppose he can't help being rather ladylike in business matters. Do drop the subject; I am sick of the whole thing. How is your conservatory, Nell? Are those violets the result of your agricultural efforts?"

"I think, Robert," his sister said in her low voice, that shivered and broke, "I must just say one thing more: I must give you back this beautiful thing you gave me at dinner. And I must go away with the children."

"What under the sun!" he began, frowning; then he got up and stood on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire. "Lydia, I hope you are not going to be a fool? What are you talking about? Sit down, — sit down! You 're as white as

a ghost. Lily, I 'm afraid you 're a great goose. What 's the matter ? " He could not help softening as he looked at her. She stood there by the little tottering table, loaded with its dozens of foolish bits of silver, so tense and quivering that even his impatient eyes could not fail to see her agitation.

" Robert, you have been so kind to us ; you are so good to us, — oh, I don't know how I can do it ! " she broke into an anguished sob, — " but I must. Mr. Eaton would never have let the children be supported on money that was not — that was not good."

There was silence ; the clock in the hall chimed ten. Then Eleanor Blair, sitting up, pale and angry, said, —

" Well, upon my word ! "

Her husband looked at his sister with sudden kindness in his eyes. " Lily, you don't understand. When I said what I did to Mr. Hudson, — of course, that has put it into your head, — I did n't really mean it. In the first place, I 'm an honest man (I 'll just mention that in passing), and it is not your business nor his

to judge my business methods. It is n't a pretty thing to look a gift-horse in the mouth, Lil."

"It is n't what you said to Mr. Hudson," she answered. "I 've been thinking about it for nearly a year. Robert, you pay them so little, and I — I have all this."

She looked about the beautiful room with a sort of fright: it seemed to her that the warm and stately walls hid human misery lying close outside, — hunger and hatred, cold and sickness, and the terror of to-morrow. The impudent luxury of this enormous wealth struck her like a blow on the mouth.

"They," she said, with a sob, "*are hungry.*"

Her brother, divided between irritation and amusement, was touched in spite of himself.

"My dear Lily," he said, "you can't understand this thing. To put it vulgarly, you 've bitten off more than you can chew. Look here, the men can go to work to-morrow if they want to; but they don't want to. I offer them work, and

they can take it or leave it. Well, they leave it. It 's their affair, not mine."

But she shook her head miserably. "I don't understand it. If you were poor, too, it would be different."

"Well, really!" said Mrs. Blair.

But Robert Blair was wonderfully patient.

"There 's another thing you must remember, Lily; these people are far better off on what I am willing to pay them than they were in Europe, where most of them came from."

"But, Robert," she said passionately, "because they could be worse off does n't seem to be any reason why they should n't be better off. And — *it is n't kind.*"

"Kind?" Her brother looked at her blankly, and then, with a shout of laughter, "Lydia, you are as good as a play! No, my dear; I don't run my mills for kindness."

"But," she said, almost in a whisper, "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you" —

Mrs. Blair made a gesture of disgust.

"— oh, brother, I did n't mean to find

fault with you. Only with myself. I — I have n't any right to spend money that I — don't know about."

"Well, anything more?" Robert Blair said, a little tired of her foolishness. "My dear, like the parson, you mean well; but you are a great goose!"

As for his wife, she did not even answer Mrs. Eaton's tremulous "good-night."

V

The husband and wife looked at each other; then Robert Blair flung his head back with a laugh.

"She is perfectly delicious!"

"She is perfectly ungrateful, and I believe she means it."

"Oh, nonsense! Lil has n't mind enough to mean anything; and I 'll tell you another thing: in spite of her quiet ways, she really has a good deal of worldly wisdom. She knows what it is to those two children to have me interested in them. Don't worry your little head" —

"Oh, I don't worry," she answered. "If she is going to presume to criticise

you, I don't want her under my roof ; the sooner she leaves the better ! "

" Spitfire ! " he told her, kissing her pretty hand, and forgetting all about his sister's absurdity, and the strike, and the men and women shivering in the tenements down in the miserable mill town.

But he remembered it all the next morning at the breakfast-table, for Lydia Eaton's white face was too striking to escape comment. Mrs. Blair was not present, preferring to be, at what she called the " brutal hour of eight," in her own room, with a tray and her maid and a novel.

" What 's the matter ? " Mr. Blair said kindly. " Are you ill, Lily ? "

" It 's what I told you last night, Robert," she said nervously.

The solemn Samuel, all ears, but looking perfectly deaf, brought a dish to his master's elbow. Robert Blair closed his lips with a snap. Then he said, —

" Please make no reference to that folly before Eleanor."

But of course it was only a respite. The folly had to be repeated to Eleanor

— discussed, argued, denounced, until the whole atmosphere of the house was charged with excitement.

Through it all Lydia Eaton came and went, and did her packing.

"Well," her sister-in-law said contemptuously, "perhaps you 'll tell me how you mean to *feed* Esther and Silas? You have a right to starve yourself, but I have some feeling for the children!"

"I am going to work," the other answered, trembling.

"Lydia," Mrs. Blair said passionately, "next to your ingratitude to your brother, I must say your selfishness in ruining your own children is the most dreadful thing I ever heard of!"

But Mrs. Eaton's preparations went on. Not that there was so much to do; but she had to find rooms, and then she had to find work. It was the latter exigency which fanned Robert Blair's contemptuous annoyance, which refused to take the matter seriously, into sudden flames of rage, for his sister saw fit to apply at a shop for the position of saleswoman. Of course it came to his ears,

and that night the storm burst on Mrs. Eaton's head. As for Robert Blair, when the interview was over, during which he spared Mrs. Eaton no detail of his furious mortification, he said savagely to his wife: "I wish you'd go and see if West cannot bring her to her senses. Get him to influence her to some decency. Tell him, if she's set in this outrageous ingratitude, I wish he would persuade her to let me send her East, to some other place, and let her work (and starve!) where she won't disgrace me. Think of it, Eleanor — that man Davis coming whining and grinning, and saying he 'would do what he could to give my sister a position as saleslady, but I knew the times were bad'! Damn him!"

"Good heavens, Robert! You don't mean to say she's been to Davis's? My dear, she is insane! Yes, I'll go and see Mr. West to-morrow."

She went. It was a raw, bleak morning; the thin, chill winter rain blurred the windows of her brougham, and the mud splashed up against the glass; the wheels sunk into deep ruts of the badly

paved streets, and the uncomfortable jolt and sway of the softly padded carriage added to her indignation at her sister-in-law.

William West did not live in the new part of Mercer, with its somewhat gorgeous houses; nor yet in the old part, which was charming and dignified, and inclined to despise everything not itself; but in the middle section, near the rows of rotten and tumbling tenements, and within a stone's throw of bleak and hideous brick blocks, known as "Company boarding-houses." He had come here to live shortly after a certain crash in his own life; a personal blow, which left him harder, and more silent, and more earnest. He had been jilted, people said, and wondered why, for a while, and then forgot it, as he, absorbed in his work, seemed also to forget it.

Mrs. Blair, her fox-terrier under one arm, stepped out of the carriage, frowning to find herself in this squalid street; but once inside the big, plain, comfortable house where William West lived all by himself, her face relaxed and took a cer-

tain arch and charming discontent; there was a big fire blazing in the minister's library, and the dignity and refinement of the room, the smell of leather-covered books, the gleam of pictures and bronzes, and a charming bit of tapestry hanging on the chimney-piece restored her sense of mental as well as physical comfort. When he entered, and dragged a big chair in front of the fire for her, and looked at her with that grave attention which seems like homage, and was part of the man, being called forth by his washerwoman as well as by Mrs. Robert Blair, she felt almost happy again, and assured that everything would come out right.

"Mr. West," she began, "you 've got to help us; we 're in such absurd difficulties! Will you?"

"Command me," he said, smiling.

"You have n't heard, then? It 's Lydia — Mr. Blair's sister, you know. She has taken it into her head that" — the color came into Mrs. Blair's face — "that she won't let Robert support her, because she thinks he is n't treating the

strikers properly. I 'm sure I don't know what idea she has! But she won't accept his money. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

William West's face sobered instantly. "I have not seen Mrs. Eaton for a fortnight," he said; "I had no idea" — He got up, frowning, the lines about his lips perplexed and anxious.

"I 'm sure," the pretty woman went on, growing angrier as she spoke, "I don't care what *she* does, — I 've lost all patience with her, — but to throw the children's future away! And it 's so embarrassing for Robert." Then she told him fully the whole situation. "She keeps saying," Mrs. Blair ended, "that 'Mr. Eaton' would n't have allowed the children to be supported on money that '*was n't good.*' Did you ever hear such impertinence?"

"Ah, well," he protested good-naturedly, "I 'm sure Mrs. Eaton does not mean to be impertinent; and I 'm sure she does appreciate her brother's kindness. Only, she is trying to work out a great problem on an individual basis,

which is of course very foolish. But the dear little lady must not be allowed — And yet" — He paused, frowning and perplexed.

"Ah, but, Mr. West, when she has the assurance to quote the Bible to her own brother — it seems to me that 's rather impertinent? Fancy! something about 'doing unto others' — and 'being partaker' if she spent the money that had been 'wrung from the strikers.' Upon my word! 'Wrung!' As I said to my husband, 'Upon my word, I never heard of such a thing.'"

"Neither did I," William West said dryly. "We are all of us in the habit of taking our dividends, and not looking at the way they are earned. Mrs. Eaton is certainly unusual."

"Well, do you think you can influence her?" Mrs. Blair insisted. "I don't mean to stay with us; I don't think that would be possible or desirable now. But to let Mr. Blair give her an allowance, so that she can take care of the children. It is positively wicked to think how she is ruining the children!"

"Won't she take any money from your husband?"

"Not a cent, if you please! Not a penny. She keeps saying that if she can't feel that the source of the money is all right, she can't spend it." Mrs. Blair cuffed her dog prettily with her muff, and kissed his little sleek head. "Is n't she a goose, Pat, you darling?"

"Her principle would turn the world upside down," the clergyman said.

"That 's just what I say!" cried Mrs. Blair.

"If we all said we would have nothing to do with the 'blood of the just person,' what would become of the railroads and the coal-mines and the oil trusts? What would become of our dividends from industrial stocks if we insisted on knowing that the workmen were honestly paid? How could we eat meat, if we looked into the slaughter-house?"

Mrs. Blair looked puzzled.

"And she is going to work for her living?" He was profoundly moved. "Good heavens, out of the mouths of babes! What a primitive expression of

social responsibility! But surely, Mrs. Blair, we must respect her honesty? As for her judgment, that 's another matter."

Eleanor Blair's blank astonishment left her speechless for a moment; then she flung up her head haughtily.

"Mr. West, do you mean to say" — she began.

"My dear Mrs. Blair," he said quietly, "I mean to say that little Mrs. Eaton, in her simple way, puts her finger right on the centre of this whole miserable question, in which, directly or indirectly, we are all involved: she has recognized our complicity. Of course she is going to work the wrong way — at least, I suppose she is. God knows! But what courage, — what directness!"

"Do I understand," Eleanor Blair said, rising, "that you approve of my sister-in-law's extraordinary conduct?"

"I approve of *her*," he said, smiling. "If you ask me whether I think she is doing right, I should say 'Yes,' because she is acting upon her conscience. Is she doing wisely? No; because civilization is compromise. We have either got

to bow in the House of Rimmon, or go and live in the woods like Thoreau and eat dried peas. I 'll tell her so, if you want me to. But as for attempting to influence her, I cannot do that. The place whereon we stand is holy ground."

Mrs. Blair picked up her dog and set her teeth; then she looked slightly beyond the clergyman, with half-shut eyes, and said, —

"Will you be good enough to have my carriage called?"

VI

"I never would have been brave enough," Mrs. Eaton said meekly to Mr. West, when the dreadful step was actually taken, "I never could have done it, but I knew Mr. Eaton would have wished it; and, besides, I felt I was taking the food of those poor people."

"Well, no," he began, "that is really not reasonable" — But he stopped; this timid creature could not reason — she could only feel. "Fools," he said to himself, as he left her, "rush in where

the political economist fears to tread. She is a fool, poor little soul, but" —

The winter had passed heavily away. Mrs. Eaton had succeeded in getting a place in Mr. Davis's shop — "where," the proprietor used to say, "having Robert Blair's sister for a saleslady is money in my pocket! She's better than a 'fire-and-water bargain sale.'" So she stood behind a counter and sold ribbon, and was stared at and whispered about. But she had very keen anxieties about food and clothes, and the children's discontent lay like a weight upon the mother's heart — which ached, too, with the pain of the second wrench from the affection and kindness of her family. Fortunately her peculiar logic did not lead her to reject the Baptist deacon's money, which was certainly much more doubtful than her brother's. By some mental process of her own, the fact that she worked for it seemed to make its acceptance moral. She had no leisure now to work for Mr. West; but the remembrance of his patience and gentleness always made a little pause of peace in her heavy thoughts.

It was a hard, bleak life for this silent little creature; and the rector of St. James, himself a silent soul, watched her live it, and pondered many things.

The strike had broken in February. The men went back to their work — defeat, like some bitter wind, blowing the flames of resentment into fiercer heat, which "next time" would mean destroying victory.

"Will it be like Samson pulling down the temple upon himself?" William West wondered, depressed and hopeless.

It was night — a summer night; sweet and still over in the old-fashioned part of Mercer, where the fragrance of roses overflowed the high brick walls of the gardens. Here in the mill district it was not sweet, and all night long the mills roared and crashed, and the flames bursting out of vast chimneys flared and faded, and flared again.

William West was alone in his library. His sermon for the next morning had been finished early in the week; he had looked it over the last thing, and now the manuscript was slipped into its black vel-

vet cover. He sat, his head on his hand, tapping with strong, restless fingers the arm of his chair. The old question, always more or less present in the mind of this man, was clamoring for an answer: How far are we responsible? Through how many hands must dishonest money, cruel money, mean money, pass to be cleansed? Is it clean when it comes to me—this dividend or that? Shall a man, or a railroad, or a trust deal iniquitously with one of these little ones, and I profit by it? Shall I trace my dollar to its source, and find it wet with tears and blood, and reject it? Or shall I decline to trace it, and buy my bread in innocence? Even the chief priests refused the thirty pieces of silver! Am I an accomplice? For that matter, is the Christian Church an accomplice? What does it say to the philanthropy of thieves? Priests used to take toll from the plunder of robbers, and say mass for their souls in return. Nowadays — "I cover my eyes, but I hold out my hand," he said to himself.

Well — well! The Reverend William West, in his way, was doubtless as great

a fool in asking unprofitable questions as was Lydia Eaton. That the existing order would be turned upside down by the introduction of the sense of personal responsibility there can be no doubt. Such an introduction would be the application to the complex egotism of the nineteenth century of the doctrines of a Galilean peasant, who was a communist and the Saviour of the world. It would be the setting forth in individual lives of the spirit of Jesus Christ, the most revolutionary element that could possibly be introduced into society. We are none of us ready for that.

At least William West was not ready; he had no intention of making himself ridiculous, no matter if he did ask himself unanswerable questions; he was not ready to throw away present opportunities and destroy his influence. Yet, as for Mrs. Eaton —

"Talk about martyrs!" he said to himself, as he sat there at midnight thinking of her, of her hard life, of her splendid foolishness.

"Well, there is one thing I could do

for her. Why not? Good God, how selfish I am! I suppose she would think my money was clean? Yes, I could at least do *that*."

This was no new thought. It had been in his mind more or less for months. He only faced it that night more strenuously.

So it came about that by and by he rose, his face set, his mouth hard. He took a key from his watch chain, and opened a little closet in the side of the chimney, and took out a box. He laid it on the table, and again sat down in his revolving chair, and stared blankly ahead of him. Then he opened it. There were some letters in it, and a picture, and a crumbling bunch of flowers that looked as though they had once been pansies; he held them in his hand, a bitter sort of amusement in his eyes. The letters he put aside, as though their touch stung him. At the photograph he looked long and intently. Then he bent the card over in his hand, and it broke across the middle. Hastily he gathered these things together and went over to his fireplace. A

fire had been laid during the cold spring rains, and the logs were dry and dusty. At the touch of a match, they sputtered and broke into a little roaring flame. William West put his handful of letters and the flowers and the picture gently down in the midst of it, and then stood and watched them burn. When there was only a white film left, on which the sparks ran back, widening and dying, he went over to his desk, and with a certain strong and satisfied cheerfulness he began to write : —

My dear Mrs. Eaton, — You and I have spoken more than once of your action in leaving your brother's house, and you know, I am sure, how profoundly I honor and respect your courage in acting upon your convictions. It is this respect which I am venturing to offer you in asking you to honor me by becoming my wife. My sincere regard and appreciation have been yours ever since I first knew you, and if you will consent to make a home for yourself and the children in my house, it will be a home for

me, and you know what that will be for a lonely man. If you will consent, I shall be always,

Faithfully yours,

WILLIAM WEST.

As he folded the sheet of paper and thrust it into the envelope there was a whimsical look in his eyes.

"A *love*-letter!" he said to himself; but his face was very gentle and tender.

However, the answer to the letter was all that the most ardent lover could desire.

COUNTING THE COST

I

ANNIE GRAHAM, the young woman with whom this story concerns itself, lived in a Western manufacturing town. Her home was, both inside and outside, like hundreds and thousands of other American homes, a cheap frame house, in a cheap, respectable suburb; a house without any other beauty or refinement than cleanliness and a certain amount of rather coarse comfort. Her father was a workingman, as his father had been before him. He was a gasfitter, and went to his work every morning with a greasy leather bundle under his arm, and a cheerful heart in his breast. First, because he had plenty of work and, having no imagination, never worried about the future. But mostly because of a comfortable fact

to which, when not occupied with the practical details of his trade, he devoted his thoughts; the fact being that there was a certain tidy bit of money in the bank for his Annie, — money which he had hoarded up, little by little, saved out of car-fares, and tobacco, and clothes; money which meant privation and courage, and slow, persistent, heavy toil. It amounted to a little over fifteen hundred dollars, and he hoped it would be twenty-five hundred before he died. What Annie would do with it when he was gone was the only direction in which Johnny Graham's fancy worked. Would she rent a better house, maybe, than this little one they had lived in since she was twelve; or would she get herself fine clothes or a piano or books? He thought that she would probably get books. Annie was so fond of reading! He was very proud of this fondness for reading, and used to tell his fellow-workmen about it, and say he had seen her turn over so many pages, in fifteen minutes by his watch. He timed her, he said, and my! but she was the fast reader! He had no

idea of placing any restrictions upon the way in which she should spend her inheritance when she got it; he had no feeling about the money as anything but a means of future pleasure to Annie.

"When I 'm dead and gone, the afternoon, maybe, of the funeral, they 'll tell her. 'Annie Graham,' the lawyer 'll say, 'your father 's left you a tidy bit of money. It 's twenty-five hundred dollars,' he 'll say; well, maybe it 'll be twenty-six hundred, — well, say three thousand. 'Miss Graham,' he 'll say, 'here 's three thousand dollars.' Well, Annie 'll jump. An' it 'll comfort her," Annie's father would think many times a day, smiling, and screwing in his gas-fixtures with his blackened fingers, or scratching a match on his trousers, and hunting for leaks.

He had been father and mother to his little girl ever since his wife died, when Annie was five. He had baked and scrubbed and cleaned for them both when she was a child, and in his clumsy way he had sewed on buttons and darned rents and washed her little face and hands as tenderly as a woman could have

done. And when she grew into a big girl and went to the grammar school, he still knew all about her hats and clothes; and he still tried to save her pretty hands, and sifted the ashes, and waited on her, and was proud of her just as he always had been. There was more than one hard-working woman neighbor who would have been willing to "make a good stepmother" to Annie, and who felt, in all honesty, that the gasfitter was spoiling his girl, and that she just only hoped nothing bad would come of it.

"Them girls that 's taken such care of, — well, the dear only knows what happens to them!" the neighbors said, with mysterious pursings of the lips. But so far nothing out of the way had happened to Annie. Nothing "bad" had come of the simple, faithful loving that the child had had.

Annie was eighteen. She was a fresh-looking girl, with an intelligent face, though a little serious for her years. Her placid gray eyes had a rather absent look sometimes, and there was a line on her white forehead that told of thought.

Johnny Graham knew what that line meant. He knew with what intensity Annie had applied herself to her studies when she was in school, and how, after she had graduated, and had gotten a place as a "saleslady," as Johnny expressed it, she still worked and toiled over her books whenever she could find time.

"But she 's mostly figurin'," he told his friends proudly.

That Annie, at eighteen, had taught herself geometry, and had yearnings for the higher calculus, was a matter of burning pride to the gasfitter, though he had no idea what it was all about.

"I suppose now, Annie, you know all there is in the arithmetics on them subjects?" he said to her one night as he sat in his shirt-sleeves smoking his pipe by the kitchen stove, and looking at his daughter, who, with her pencil pressed against her lips, was frowning over a sheet of calculations. Annie gave a little start and looked up smiling.

"Why, father, dear, I don't know anything — comparatively."

"But, Annie, now what 's the good of

them lines? Do you cut patterns on 'em? I seen a advertisement saying they 'd show you how to cut out dresses on a chart. And there was a lot of them lines drawed on it."

Annie came over and sat on his knee; she laughed, but she sighed, too.

"No; it 's just working them out that I like," she said. "I guess I like studying; that 's it."

"Well, you 're a real student, I guess," he told her, and passed his rough, grimy hand over her soft hair. "Did I pull your hair?" he said, for it seemed as though she winced; but she only answered by taking his hand and kissing it, which made her father protest, and then cuddle her up in his arms and say, "Well, now, Annie, I think you 're a real scholar."

They sat in the kitchen, but not because they had not a parlor, like everybody else. There was a best room behind the kitchen, and upstairs two bedrooms, and above them an attic, rented to Dave Duggan, a steady young workman who had lodged with them for nearly a year.

Of course, obviously — propinquity being the root of love — he had a tenderness for Annie; and he was referred to by the women who were not Annie's step-mothers as her "feller." The parlor, in which the gasfitter rarely sat, was as frankly ugly as the outside of the small, narrow frame house. It had been furnished according to Mrs. Graham's taste, and it had been religiously unchanged since her death. The tapestry carpet, with its monstrous roses and broad green leaves, had worn and faded into inoffensiveness, and the red rep furniture had suffered the same kindly change; but the knitted tidies were new, and the plush picture frames; and Annie had added the knots of china silk on the chair-backs; and on the wall there was a snow-shovel, painted and gilded and tied with pink satin ribbons, and also some decorated brass placques; on the mantelpiece were two little wooden shoes,— Dave Duggan's gift,— gilded and adorned with blue satin bows, and used as match-boxes.

To Johnny Graham this terrible parlor stood for art and luxury. As for Annie,

she did not know enough to find the snow-shovel painful, nor even the rolling-pin, another gift from Dave, which, covered with plush, hung from one corner of the mantelpiece. She merely thought of these things as "mother's" and as "presents," and valued them accordingly. But she would never have dreamed of occupying this fine room unless there was company; and, indeed, the kitchen was far more homelike.

She sat now nestling down against her father's shoulder, listening to his story of the day's work: the fine house on the hill where he had gone to mend a fixture; the nice young lady he had seen; and the toilet-table all covered with silver things.

"Why, Annie, now I tell you, there was brushes and combs made out of silver; and there was five little sorts of silver boxes, different sizes and shapes, hearts and rounds mostly. Did n't seem to have nothing in 'em. I had to move 'em to get at the bracket. What do you suppose folks has such things for? Now a brush made out o' silver is no sense;

it's heavy. Annie, now, would you like things like that?"

"Indeed, I would n't," she said. "Think of the trouble they 'd be to keep clean."

"Well, the help does that in them houses, I suppose," he ruminated. "Annie, now, suppose you had a lot of money, would you buy them things?"

"Indeed, I would n't!" Annie said again, laughing. "No, I know what I 'd do. I heard a girl talking about it. There 's a college for girls somewhere in the East, just like there is for young men. I would go to that college and study. My! would n't I study!"

. . . . . .

That was the beginning of what some people called the tragedy of Annie Graham's life, and some the success — it all depends on how you look at it.

Her chance remark about a girl's college lingered in her father's thoughts; Johnny Graham had not known that there were such things as women's colleges. There were primary schools and high schools and "pay" schools, where he supposed the swells sent their chil-

dren, but his knowledge never went farther than this.

"A college for girls!" Well, why not? He believed girls was smarter than boys any day in the year; anyway his Annie was. He thought about it constantly, when, to save something for that inheritance in the bank, he walked to and from his work; and he thought of it while he worked. He spoke of it, when he had the chance, in a tentative way to two or three persons for whom he was doing jobs of gasfitting. Did they ever hear anything of them girls' colleges? What was they like? Did they cost money? Once, in the big morning-room of an old-fashioned house, he spoke to an old lady who sat by the fire while he screwed a lava tip on the burner over the mantelpiece. She was an old woman and rich, and so she ought to know about such things, Johnny Graham reasoned; so, with the respectful guilelessness of the American workman, he cleared his throat and said, he wondered, now, if she was knowing anything about girls' colleges?

The old woman started, and seemed to see him for the first time, and put on her glasses to inspect him.

"What did you say, my good man?" she inquired.

Johnny, unoffended by this offensive term, which means, "you are not so good as I am," repeated his question mumblingly, with the old lava tip between his lips.

"I have a girl I 'm thinking of sending to one of them institutions," he explained.

The old lady frowned and took off her glasses and tapped them on the arm of her chair.

"You will make a great mistake, my good man. It is a great mistake to educate your daughter above her position."

Johnny took the lava tip out of his mouth and stared at her.

"Well, now, ma'am," he said in his slow way, "I don't see how you make that out. An American girl is an American girl; no matter how you look at it. You can't educate her above that."

Upon which the old lady nodded her head and said: "Yes, yes; of course; this is what I've always said; this is what we are coming to!"

And Johnny Graham rolled up his tools in his greasy leather apron, and went home, pondering deeply. He was not in the least angry at the old lady; he was simply incapable of understanding her. But that night he thought it over, and pointed out to himself that, after all, if Annie's mind was set that way, there was no use in her waiting to spend her money till he was dead and gone.

"I'll probably be livin' twenty years yet," he thought, after some calculation, "and Annie maybe would be too old for a girls' college then. She'd better go now; and anyway it might be a good investment of the money; she might set up as a teacher, maybe, after she got learned. They do say Councilman Welch's daughter got four hundred dollars for teachin' in the Primary School; and that's twenty per cent. interest on two thousand dollars; I believe it's a good thing!"

It was then that Annie came in, looking, it chanced, a little pale, and, perhaps, a little wistful. Annie was not discontented; she had no aspirations; only the child was vaguely aware of an emptiness in her life. And she had stopped at the Public Library as she came home from her work, and had read an article in a magazine concerning a College for Women in another State.

"That 's what I 'd do if I were rich," she thought, as she walked home. "I 'd go there and study."

So she was a little absent, even when she kissed her father, and heard him tell all about the big house where the rich old woman lived all by herself, because she had quarreled with her only daughter.

"Seems strange, now, to quarrel with your children," said Johnny, buttering his bread on the tablecloth, and then, tilting his chair back, eating it with great contentment.

After supper he told Annie what he had planned for her. Her amazement at her father's wealth was almost as keen a

delight to Johnny as was her impetuous refusal to use it, and her tears because he was "so good" to her; almost as keen a joy as her final yielding to the logic of his urging, that, after all, the family would be better off if she could teach, and earn a big salary. "Six hundred dollars, maybe," he said, stretching his imagination for the purpose of convincing her.

So it was arranged. Annie Graham was to go away to study; she was to fit herself to be a teacher; she was to be educated into her father's intellectual superior; she was to be raised "above her station." Would it be a failure or a success? Would she be happy or most miserable? Would the little dull, loving, ignorant gasfitter hold or lose his girl?

Well, it all depends upon how you look at it.

. . . . . .

The result of the talk that night was that in September Annie took the long and expensive journey East, and entered on her four years' course of study.

Of course, there was no coming home for the holidays ; the fifteen hundred dollars in the bank could not stand that ; nor did she have to come back in the long vacation, which would have been a serious expense, for the president of the college, who was greatly impressed by the girl's ability and character, permitted her to live in one of the college houses during the summer, and found for her an opportunity to teach some little children. She earned enough money to pay her board during those twelve weeks, and did not have to draw on the cherished bank account.

The beginning of that college life was a strange experience to Annie, — the quiet, refined atmosphere, the beauty of culture, the conception of spaciousness and dignity, and the awaking of that sense of fitness which is called conventionality. To Annie these things were like the opening of the eyes of one born blind. By degrees the small niceties of life revealed themselves to her, — the delicacies of serving, the delicacies of living, the delicacies of manner and voice

and thought. She felt them all with a passionate sort of joy.

It is curious to observe that by the pure and virgin mind these things, which may be so worthless in their lifeless formality, are seen in their real and fundamental nobility, and are accepted with the instinct of religion. At first Annie was so normally unconscious of her antecedents that it did not occur to her to proclaim that all these things were new. And then, by and by, having eaten of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there came to her a certain deep spiritual experience ; she recognized that the root of conventionality, the beginning of the sense of fitness, lay in character ; therefore she knew no shame that her father ate with his knife, or sat in his shirt-sleeves, or did many unlovely things. She did not like them ; but she knew no shame, only love. But it was then that, very simply, she took occasion to say that her father, who was a mechanic, had sent her here to college, so that she might be fitted to support herself by teaching. She said this because she recognized an-

other point of view, and, recognizing it, felt a certain lack of straightforwardness in keeping silent; and also because she was proud of Johnny Graham. Then she forgot it. It was too unimportant to think of.

She assimilated all these new ideas, and felt them and lived them, as though she had been to the manner born. Her very face reflected them. She was almost a beautiful young woman. Her deep eyes looked out from under her straight, pure brows with a certain high directness of glance and tranquil self-poise which gave a sense of breeding which was inescapable. The fact that she had said that she was poor was only in its way another proof of her superiority — so some of the college-girls said, who went into schoolgirl ecstasies about her.

"You know it 's vulgar to be rich," a young man told her one evening, as they talked together in the June dusk. It was Annie's fifth year, and for the first time she was going home in the long vacation. A scholarship, and four sum-

mers of teaching some little children in a country house on the outskirts of the village, had meant that for the last two years Johnny Graham's bank account had been recuperating, a very, very little; at all events, there had been no drain upon it.

And now Annie was going home. She had won the highest honors of her class, and had even been offered a position on the college staff, and her happiness was as frank as a child's.

"In so many weeks I'll see father. In so many days!" — she kept saying to herself. And now it had come to Saturday evening, and she was to start home on Monday. She was walking back from her little pupils' house, where she had said good-by until September. She was not alone.

A certain Dick Temple, a cousin of her pupils' mother, had a way of running down from town to spend Sundays with the Pauls, to play, he said, with the children, and get in some rowing on the river, and to exercise his cousin John's polo ponies, and — to see Annie Graham.

But this last was not so stated in the bond.

He had a way of appearing in time to walk across the campus with her, after little Kate's music lesson Saturday afternoon, and once or twice he had beguiled her into his boat, and they had gone floating down the river in the twilight, talking of everything in heaven and earth. Being young, religion had been their first theme; and then, by and by, love; — in the abstract, of course. A month ago, they both had feared themselves incapable of experiencing this beautiful emotion — Annie, because she was going to devote herself to study and her father; Dick, because he had outlived such things, and was very bitter and cynical and mysterious in his allusions to life, which, he said, "he knew." Sometimes they talked of their future; and it was then that Annie had told him, smiling, that she had no such luxurious prospects as those which he had been outlining for himself, — travel, and study, and the philanthropic opportunities of great wealth.

They were walking slowly along under

the great elms toward her door; it had rained earlier in the day, and the worn bricks of the narrow pavement held here and there shallow pools of water; the sun struck across the wet grass in a low flood of gold; and there was the scent of young leaves and roses in the air.

"We are poor people," Annie had said, with an amused look; "I 'm going to teach school and wear spectacles, and be very stern and learned."

"Ah, well," returned the young man, "it 's the thing to be poor nowadays; it 's awfully vulgar to be rich! It 's queer, now, when you think of it, Miss Graham, how many people in our class have lost their money, is n't it?"

"We 've never had it to lose," Annie said; "the family fortunes are to rise on school-teaching."

Dick glanced at her with quick admiration in his handsome young eyes. He was twenty-four, but he blundered over his words like a schoolboy.

"Miss Graham," he said, "you won't mind if I say I think it 's awfully fine in you, don't you know, to teach, and all

that sort of thing? Of course, girls do things now. I mean nice girls, don't you know. Why, cousin Kate gave music lessons before she married; and she was a Townsend. Still, it 's people like that, don't you know, that can afford to do things like that!"

"I don't suppose any one can afford to be dependent," Annie said simply, "and my father is really poor, Mr. Temple."

Her beautiful direct look as she said this made the young fellow's heart suddenly leap. He wanted to burst out and tell her how much he admired her; admired? no, loved her! That was the word. Yes, he, who had thought he had outlived all that sort of thing. All in a moment he felt that he wanted to tell her this; but she seemed so remote that he dared not speak.

"I suppose I ought to get my governor to go and call on hers," he reflected; "these decayed gentlefolks are death on propriety. But maybe she would n't look at me, anyway," he added to himself, in a miserable afterthought; for she began

to speak in such an interested way of some mathematical work she had to do that night, that he felt there was no room for him in her thoughts. He left her at the college door and went back, ardent and despairing, to confide in his cousin Kate, who, it must be admitted, had rather a startled expression when he told her he was "all bowled over by Miss Graham."

"But, Dick, what would your father say if it got serious? Cousin Henry has such ideas, you know. She's a charming girl, but we don't know anything about her people."

"We know they are poor," Dick said boldly; "but that does n't matter in the least. Surely you are not so narrow, Cousin Kate, as to think it matters?"

"No, that does n't matter, of course," cousin Kate said doubtfully.

. . . . . .

As for Annie, she went, smiling a little, and blushing a little, upstairs to her room. But she did no work in higher mathematics that night.

Instead, she finished her packing, and

wrote her last semi-weekly letter of the term to her father. To be sure, he would get it just a day or two before she came herself; but she would not have had Johnny Graham miss that Saturday letter for a good deal. She knew he would carry it about in his pocket, and read it over and over, and put it on the wooden chair beside his bed at night. Perhaps it was a little more affectionate, this last letter, than usual; she told him about the weather, and that she would start on Monday, and would telegraph him when to expect her. And something of the progress of her two pupils; and how she had made an experiment in the laboratory, and had burned her fingers; and — and that she had met an interesting man, a cousin of Mrs. Paul's. He had taken her out rowing once or twice, she said. And, oh! she was so happy that she was coming home! She could hardly believe that it was true, she was so glad. And then she said she was always his little girl who loved him — "Annie."

Then when it was written, she put her head down on her arms, folded upon her

writing-table; there were tears in her eyes when she lifted it again.

"When he said 'our class,' ought I to have spoken?" she asked herself. "No, he must know; I told Mrs. Paul. No, no, I could n't!" And all her love and all her pride for her father rebelled against the slight to him which such a confession would have been; it would have seemed to imply that he was less gentle in soul than Richard Temple himself, or any one else.

Mr. Temple saw her at church the next day and walked home with her; although she kept all the while on Mrs. Paul's right, while Dick had to walk on the outside and could only look across at her, which did not please him in the least. She did not talk to him very much, but she seemed to have a good deal to say to his cousin, which perplexed her adorer, for though he had a proper regard for the stout and estimable Mrs. Paul, he could not see why Miss Graham should talk to her with such apparent interest, when an intelligent young man was really eager for a look or a word. He heard her

laughing a little about going home "like a stranger and foreigner," she said.

"I have n't seen South Bend for nearly five years; you know it is such an expensive journey."

Mrs. Paul said yes, she supposed it was. "It takes four days and five nights to get there, does n't it? It seems to me I passed through it once. I suppose those Western places are very progressive, are n't they? They are not shocked at the idea of a university education for women. One runs up against that here very often."

Annie shook her head, smiling. "Is n't it funny to think that people do really feel that it is unfeminine; 'threatening to the womanly woman,' as they say."

"I 've come to think that the 'womanly woman' means the brainless woman," Mrs. Paul said.

"What fools people are who feel that way about the higher education of women," Dick broke in. "It 's incredible! Miss Graham, I shall be passing through South Bend in a fortnight or so; may I call?"

"Of course; I shall be delighted to see you," Annie said, "and my father will be so glad to see any friend of Mrs. Paul's; he knows how kind you have been to me," she ended, with an affectionate look at Dick's cousin.

Then Mr. Temple, with an eager timidity so foreign to him that Mrs. Paul suppressed a smile with difficulty, wondered if Miss Graham would have time to go out on the river that evening? He knew she would be awfully busy; but it would be a heavenly evening on the river! He was so promptly assured that she should not have time that the poor fellow looked very blank; in fact, he was distinctly cross in the family circle for the rest of the day. At night he softened and tried to be amiable, for he was constrained to be confidential, and he knew that "Cousin Kate" would not hesitate to snub him unless he made himself agreeable.

"Now, really, don't you think she 's very unusual?" he insisted, after having told Mrs. Paul all the pleasant things which he could remember that Miss

Graham had said to him about her two little pupils.

"If you mean Miss Graham, why, yes, I do think she's unusual, Dick."

"Did you ever notice," said the fatuous Dick, "how softly her hair grows around her forehead? And her eyes — what color are her eyes?"

"I'm sure I can't say," Mrs. Paul answered dryly. "Dick, would you mind going in and getting me a shawl? It's rather cool out here on the terrace." When he came back she had made up her mind how to proceed. "Now, Dick, listen, I'm not a snob, but" —

"If you are going to say anything about that beautiful creature's working for her living," Dick threatened, "you might as well stop on the spot."

"Of course I'm not going to say anything about her working for her living; why should I? I worked for my living before I married John. You know I'm not a snob, but I do believe in class. I don't mean to be unkind, and certainly she is a charming girl, and — ladylike. But — there is something, I can't tell

what it is — that seems as if she had not always been used to things" —

Dick Temple said something between his teeth, and his cousin flung her head up.

"Dick!"

"Well, it makes a man want to be emphatic, Cousin Kate, — such nonsense! Class? We're Americans, thank the Lord! And talk about ancestors, I never saw descent so plainly. Look at the way she carries her head! And her voice, her manner! Darn it, because a girl's poor" —

"Good-night, Richard," said Mrs. Paul, rising with great dignity.

"Oh, hold on! Don't get mad. Hold your base. I apologize; only, it seems pretty hard to be down on a girl" —

"You know I'm not down on her; I like her very much; I respect her very much."

"Well, then, what's the matter?" demanded Dick boldly.

"I don't know. Only I have a vague recollection that when she came to teach the children she mentioned, in a casual

sort of way, something about — about her home, or her father and mother, or something. I can't really remember, but I know I gained the impression that she was" —

"Poor?" Dick burst in. "Of course she's poor. She has never made any secret of that. Why should she? Only a cad would do that."

"I don't mean poor," Mrs. Paul said, frowning. "I wish you would have some manners, Dick, and not interrupt. I merely mean that a young man has no right to pay attention to a girl in another class unless he means to follow it up. I despise a trifler, Dick."

"You don't despise him any more than I do," Dick returned loftily. "But there isn't any question of class here. We don't have any higher class than hers; and as for 'following it up,' as you say — if a fellow thought there was any chance for him with that woman he'd follow it up quick enough, and ask her to marry him! Yes, and he ought to do it as formally as though she were a princess. She *is* a princess! He ought to go

and ask her father if he might ask her. Her poverty, which seems to trouble you so much, Cousin Kate, has no bearing on the situation."

Poor Dick was smarting with Annie's apparent coldness and his cousin's snobbishness — so he called it; but there was really no excuse for bursting out at Mrs. Paul in this way; and it was no wonder that she said good-night with some asperity, and went upstairs and told her husband that Dick was a perfect goose, besides being rather a cub.

"He 's twenty-four and old enough to know better," she said. "Oh, dear, I do wish his father was here!"

"You 'd better wish her father was here; then you 'd know the pit whence she was digged," John Paul said. "Of course, if he ever sold cotton by the yard, Dick's future happiness would be imperiled."

"Now, John, don't be horrid," said his wife impatiently; "you know perfectly well what I mean. I 'm not a snob, as I told Dick, but there is such a thing as class."

"If Dick 's worth anything," pronounced John Paul, standing before his glass and ripping his collar off the stud with a vicious tug, "he 'll marry that girl if her father is a hod-carrier."

II

Five years! It was a long time. Johnny, standing in the railroad station, his heart beating high with pride and joy, could n't help crying out when he saw her: —

"Why, how you 've growed, Annie! Bless my heart, if you ain't growed!" But his eyes were misty, so perhaps it was that made his little Annie look so tall. He had not recognized her for a moment, — this lady who, with the tears trembling in her eyes, came up to him and took his hands and cried out, "Father!" Afterward he said he did n't know why he had taken her for a lady, for, sakes alive, her clothes were plain enough. He was quite distressed about her clothes.

"You 've stinted yourself, Annie," he

reproached her as they went home in the street cars. "You ought to be havin' a silk dress, lookin' the way you do. Why, I took you for a lady, Annie. You ought to have fine clothes, my pretty; we 'll take some money out of the bank and get you a regular silk dress," he told her, scolding her and loving her, and bursting with pride, and taking up their intercourse just where it had paused, five years ago. She was a pretty girl and a great learner, Johnny thought; but she was just his Annie.

It was late when they got home. He had left the kitchen fire clear and ready for the steak Annie would broil, and the gas was flaring wide from new burners, and Johnny had bought a long plush scarf for the top of the mantelpiece over the kitchen range. When Annie was fairly in the house, and the door was shut, it seemed as though the happiness of heaven had come into the little kitchen. Johnny laughed, and drew the back of his hand across his nose, and sniffed and blinked, and the tears ran freely down his little cheeks. He walked round and round

Annie in critical inspection; and ran her from room to room, even up to Dave Duggan's attic, to show her how unchanged everything was. He made her come into the parlor and showed her the faded ribbons and tottering plush frames.

"I dusted 'em every Sunday, Annie," he said. And then he told her how he had turned out the person to whom he had rented her old room. "Well, now, he was set on stayin'," Johnny said; "he was always sayin' he wanted to see you, but I guess Dave Duggan was just as well pleased not to have him round. Dave ain't married yet, Annie." Then Johnny laughed very much, and added, winking at his own joke, that he guessed Dave had forgotten her, she 'd been away so long.

The wonderful thing about it all, and the beautiful thing about it all, was that this little man did not in the least care that his Annie was an educated woman; he did not even know it.

It seemed as if Annie could not enough show the tenderness that made her heart ache with its swelling. She sat beside

him, holding his work-roughened hands in hers, and told him over and over about these five years which he had given her; she knew, and she was feeling as she spoke, how every joy of study, and every pang of the happiness of appreciation had come from these patient, loving, grimy old hands. "You 've given me everything," her heart was saying, "and I love you! I can never say how much." But it seemed as though it were saying, also, "Why, why did you put me where I was to learn that you were you, and I was I?"

One looks on at such a situation and says, "If it could stop here, it might be possible." But it cannot stop there. It is not the adjustment of the relations between parents and child which is the difficult thing. The acceptance of a different point of view by these three may even come without much pain. No; it is the outsiders who make the situation impossible — the father's cronies, the mother's friends, the acquaintances of the untaught girlhood. The impossibility revealed itself that very night when Dave

Duggan came in to welcome her home. Annie gave him her hand, flushing and paling at his familiarity, his boisterous, facetious "Hollo, Annie! How you was?" In him, after that easy greeting, the first note of the difference made for all time was struck; for he grew conscious and uneasy, and scuffled his feet, and cleared his throat, and laughed in a silly way. Yet all the old admiration spoke in his eyes. Johnny was full of significant jokes, and kept elbowing Annie and winking; and Dave's loud rebukes of his host's "fun" were even more meaning.

At nearly midnight Annie went upstairs, tired, white, smiling; and lay open-eyed until dawn.

. . . . . .

Dick Temple's intention of "passing through South Bend in a fortnight" was a little delayed. Cousin Kate's vague misgivings took the form of a postscript in a casual note to his mother; there was no more than a word or two about Dick's *tendresse* for a pretty college-girl who had been the children's governess during

the last three summers while they were out of town; that was all. But it was enough. And Mrs. Paul felt she had done her duty.

"And perhaps prevented Dick from doing his," her husband commented grimly.

"If he can be prevented, he'd better be; for he would n't be good enough for Annie Graham!" cousin Kate declared with much spirit, and immediately became, in her own mind, the champion of the incipient love affair.

Her letter was passed on by Dick's mother to Dick's father, who said good-naturedly that the boy was a jackass.

"The young lady is probably too good for him," said Mr. Henry Temple, "but I'm not going to have that boy marrying John Paul's governess without a few remarks from me."

Mr. Temple telegraphed his son not to leave town on the day he had arranged, as he wished to see him; and then he came all the way from Old Chester for the purpose of making the remarks, which, of course, were to be general; it

would give the matter too much importance to treat it as particular or probable. So, in a casual way, he referred to cousin Kate's letter, and enjoined his son not to be a fool. Dick's instantly aggressive attitude and skill in "answering back" were most surprising to Mr. Temple. A man is always surprised at his son's ability in this direction; it is as though his own hand or foot suddenly acquired individuality. Furthermore, Richard was very sentimental, and had much to say of his father's un-American point of view and of his own readiness to marry a "woman he loved" (if she 'd have him) if she were a washerwoman.

"As for Miss Graham," said Dick, "I 've no right even to speak of her; but she 's a lady, and an angel" —

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mr. Temple. "I wonder if I ever was as young as you, Dickon?"

But he was really disturbed, and wrote to a friend who owned the great South Bend Rolling and Smelting Furnaces, and might be expected to know who and what the Grahams were.

Meantime, Dick Temple, twice as much in earnest for his father's not unreasonable expostulation, packed his things and started for the West. It was a hot July afternoon when he arrived in South Bend; he was fretted by the heat and his own impatience and the stupidity of the landlord of the hotel in being unable to tell him where Mr. Graham lived.

"There 's no family by that name on the hill, sir," he said. "Graham — Graham — there 's some Grahams here in the directory; what 's the gentleman's business, sir?"

"I don't know," Dick said, fuming. "What sort of a place is this, anyhow, that you don't know where people live? It 's small enough for you to know everybody" —

"We 've twenty thousand inhabitants, young man," said the landlord with much offense. "The only Graham I know is Johnny; he 's a gasfitter, and does odd jobs here once in a while" —

"Have your clerk copy all those Graham addresses," said Dick coldly. "I 'll go round till I find the person I wish.

Unfortunately I don't know the gentleman's first name. Have you got any kind of conveyance in this place? Just have a hack called, will you?"

He spoke with the insolence of tone peculiar to well-bred young men, and he walked to the open door and stood waiting for the carriage and frowning out at the passers-by. There was a red glare from the furnaces on the other side of the river, shifting and fading on the coils of black smoke which lay motionless in the still, hot air. The street was the narrow unlovely street of the small manufacturing town of the West.

"It 's a beastly place," Dick said to himself with an irritation which had its root in some formless apprehension; and he got into the lumbering, rattling hack and slammed the door with vicious emphasis. "What on earth does her father live here for, anyhow?" he said to himself.

The carriage drew up first at a small market, where piles of faded vegetables, flanked by glass cases of meats, jutted out upon the pavement; a man in a dirty

white butcher's frock leaned against the door-post, and two jets of gas flared and flickered from long iron stand-pipes.

The driver leaned down from his box and called out in friendly tones to know if this was the place.

"Idiot!" said Dick under his breath. "Of course not. Try the next address."

This was a forlorn, untidy-looking house on a side street. Lodgers' heads were thrust out of the windows as Dick climbed the steps and inquired whether Miss Annie Graham lived there? He was conscious of a distinct relief when he went back again to the carriage. They went to two other houses, but there was no Miss Annie Graham.

"I guess," said the hackman, "we 'll have to cross over to the other side of the river. There 's a Graham over there, at Jack's Corners. Jack's Corners is a fine suburb, sir."

Dick's heart rose.

"All right; go on," he said. "Can't you hurry those beasts of yours up?"

And so it was that, about seven o'clock, the cabman drew up before a small, de-

tached frame house on the Mill Road. It was so hot that the kitchen windows were wide open, and one could see the table drawn up between them, and a little man in his shirt-sleeves eating his supper. Opposite him, by the other window, was a girl with a fan in her hand, and between them were two other persons, for Johnny was entertaining that night. Dave Duggan, uncomfortable, he knew not why (although it certainly was not the weather, for he had, with great good sense, removed his coat), sat on Annie's left; and next to him, beside Johnny, was an enormously fat woman, in a sort of loose white sack. This was Mrs. Pugsley, who was one of those neighboring ladies of thwarted stepmother potentialities. "But you never know what 'll happen," Mrs. Pugsley often remarked, and dropped in this hot July night in a friendly way to see if Annie was making her father comfortable. It was Mrs. Pugsley's opinion that all this learning was n't no good. "Better know how to dish a meal's victuals," said Mrs. Pugsley, "than be readin' story

papers all the time. That 's what them high-school girls does mostly."

The room was faintly lighted by a kerosene lamp on the mantelpiece ; but the real radiance was in Johnny's face, as he looked across a bunch of roses in the middle of the narrow table at his Annie.

"Annie walked out two miles to get them flowers," he said.

"Must 'a' wanted something to do," said Mrs. Pugsley.

"I 'd 'a' got 'em for you, Annie," Dave said bashfully, "if I 'd a-known you wanted 'em." And it was just then that the carriage drew up at the door.

Dick, hot and disappointed and disgusted at the coachman's stupidity in bringing him into this obviously mechanic's suburb, leaned out to say, "Drive on!" And then he saw her.

There was a flutter in the tenement at seeing a hack draw up. Johnny Graham rose, seeing in a burst of fancy an important and hasty job, and a carriage sent to convey him to a wilderness of leaks or broken tips. Mrs. Pugsley con-

ceived the hack to be a summons from a lady friend who had expected to need her services on a felicitous occasion, and was instantly agitated, and got up panting, and saying : —

"Goodness ! they 've sent !"

But Annie knew.

One wonders if she flinched, there in the twilight. She rose at once and went to the front door, her hand outstretched in pleased welcome.

"Why, Mr. Temple ! This is very pleasant," she said. "Father, dear, this is Mr. Temple."

Dick's face was white. He took Johnny Graham's hand and bowed, with some murmured reference to pleasure.

"This is my friend, Mr. Duggan, Mr. Temple," Annie went on placidly, "and Mrs. Pugsley."

Dick bowed twice. He saw dimly, in the dusky kitchen interior, two other figures, one of which, assisted by the other, was struggling into a coat.

"Why, now set down, sir," Johnny said joyously ; "take a seat and set down. Annie, now, can't you make room there

by Dave? We was just setting out to eat our tea, sir; it 's so hot, we was late, — but it 's the style to be late, I hear! I guess we ain't eat up everything, have we, Annie? I guess there 's something left for your gentleman friend."

"You 're very kind," Dick protested feebly; but he sat down, too bewildered to find any excuse.

Annie put a plate before him, and told him he must have some iced tea.

"It 's the only thing that makes life possible in this weather," she said; "but I can't make father believe it; he takes his boiling."

"Well, sir," said Johnny, "you had quite a jaunt to get out here, had n't you? But I don't mind the walk myself, back and forth from my work, for it 's fresher out here."

"I did n't know your address," Dick said, not looking at Annie; "I 've been driving round" —

"When I saw that carriage drive up," Mrs. Pugsley said, still panting, "I thought a lady friend of mine had sent for me; it give me such a start!"

"Tell me how you left Mrs. Paul," Annie asked.

"Oh, thanks, very well," Dick assured her; and there was a moment's pause. Mrs. Pugsley and Dave were blankly silent. Annie talked against time.

"It was so nice to get home. Just think, I had been away five years," she said; "that 's a pretty long time not to see one 's father; father did n't know me when he met me at the station; — now, I would have known you anywhere!" she reproached Johnny, with a loving look.

"Well, but now, you 'd growed, Annie; that 's what I said when I saw her. I says, 'Why, Annie, you 've growed!' Dave, here, don't see no change in her. But I do," Johnny ended proudly.

"You must have missed your daughter very much," Mr. Temple murmured.

"Well, indeed, an' he did," Mrs. Pugsley said resentfully; "but she would be studyin'. She 's that set on it."

"Miss Graham is devoted to mathematics," Dick began miserably, "and — and that sort of thing" —

He stopped so abruptly that Mrs. Pugsley's hoarse whisper to Dave Duggan was audible to all, —

"Say, is he Annie's feller?"

"Hush!" said Dave Duggan.

Dick drank his tumbler of iced tea with violent haste, and even Johnny looked disconcerted. Annie said something about the roses.

"The thing I miss most in South Bend are the gardens," she said. "You know we are all working people on this side of the river, and there are no old houses, so there are no beautiful big gardens. I had to walk far out into the country for those."

"Won't you have anything more?" Johnny inquired hospitably. "Take another helping of something? You won't? Oh, now, take a taste of this! No? Well, let 's go into the parlor, Annie."

If Annie held back, no one saw it. They went into the best room, where Johnny set all the gas burners flaring, that the full glories of the decorations

might strike the visitor, who, indeed, saw nothing but Annie's set face.

"Miss Graham," he said, "you are coming East again in September, are n't you?"

"I think not; I think I must never leave father again. He is not very strong, and I want to be with him."

"Oh, yes, quite so," Dick answered, "but" —

"But what, Mr. Temple?"

"Oh, nothing; I only thought — I thought you were to teach in the college, and" —

He did not know how to end his sentence; he caught Dave Duggan's eyes glowering at him, and Johnny's rather obsequious smile. Johnny had the true American veneration for wealth, and he felt that this gentleman who kept a hack waiting for an hour was a rich man.

"I shall never leave my father," Annie said, in a low voice.

Now Richard Temple was not a mean or unworthy man; he was a well-born, well-bred, well-educated young American gentleman; but he had been placed sud-

denly at a cruel disadvantage; his presence of mind deserted him — he was bewildered and confounded. His plans and hopes were all adrift. He could not meet Annie Graham's eyes again; he said good-night, at first effusively, and then haughtily; and sneaked out to his carriage, anxious only to escape from an intolerable situation.

"Hope you 'll come again and talk over old times with Annie, sir," Johnny said, shaking Dick's hand all the time that he was speaking; "you 'll call again, sir?"

"Oh, certainly, yes, of course," Dick answered wretchedly.

But Annie knew better.

. . . . . .

Dave Duggan had watched Annie's visitor with burning eyes. He followed the conversation with painful intentness, and a sense of speed which made him breathless. He wished to join in it, — and kept moistening his lips and clearing his throat, but he never found the courage to speak. His shyness probably prevented him from being rude; for his

feeling about Dick was rage, pure and simple.

"He 's a blamed dude," he thought to himself again and again; but he could think of nothing to say which would convey this opinion, and yet fit into the conversation. But when Dick had slunk back to his carriage Dave's feelings burst forth. For a few moments, indeed, the little group (except Annie) talked, in their excitement, all together.

"Ain't he handsome!" Johnny said proudly; he was proud of anything connected with Annie.

"He 's real rich, Annie, ain't he? Ridin' in hacks?" Mrs. Pugsley demanded.

"He 's a blamed dude; that 's what he is," Dave said fiercely.

"I thought he was your feller, Annie," Mrs. Pugsley declared, panting and fanning herself.

"Well, now, he 's none too good to be," Johnny announced, chuckling.

"Father, dear, would n't it be nicer to sit out on the steps, where it 's cooler? I 'll put the tea things away, and then

I 'll come, too. Please — *go !* " she ended. Johnny looked at her in surprise, sensitive to every change in her voice.

" Why, now — Annie ? " he faltered.

" I 'll be through with the dishes in a few minutes, father, dear," she said ; and so Johnny led the way to the front door and placed a chair on the hard, black earth at the foot of the steps for Mrs. Pugsley, and told Dave to take off his coat again.

" It 's that hot," Johnny said, " there 's no good wearin' coats."

" Now that dude 's gone, I suppose there 's no harm being comfortable," Dave agreed angrily.

They sat there in the dusk, Johnny and Mrs. Pugsley talking the visit over. They could hear Annie moving about in the kitchen, washing the dishes. After a while Dave Duggan got up and with painstaking and elaborate efforts not to attract attention went, with creaking, clumsy steps, into the kitchen. Annie stood by the sink, with her back to him. He heard her draw in her breath in a

broken sob; and then he saw — he saw that tears were running down her face.

"Annie!" he said; "oh, now, Annie, don't, don't mind, Annie, dear!" He put out his hands beseechingly, his face red and wincing with feeling. Annie turned her shoulder toward him, and set her teeth. She drew her wrist across her eyes.

"It 's that dude 's hurt your feelin's, Annie — darn him! but never you mind, he ain't worth" —

"Oh, please go away, Dave," Annie said; "you don't know what you are talking about! Please go back to father."

"Annie," he burst out, "look here: he ain't worth it. I say, Annie, will you take up with me?"

"I really don't know what you are talking about. Mr. Temple — if you are referring to him — has not hurt my feelings in the least. I — I had something on my mind, and" —

"Oh, Annie," poor Dave said, "what I 'm wanting to know" — He stood there in his shirt-sleeves beside the sink,

his voice trembling, one big red hand opening and shutting the hot-water spigot. "I 'm just wanting to know if you 'll marry me, Annie. Say, now, will you ?"

She shrank from him, a sort of horror in her face.

"*You ?*"

"You ain't mad ?" he entreated.

"It is quite impossible," she answered hoarsely; "quite, quite! Never speak to me of such a thing" — Her face was stinging, her voice was broken, as a woman's might be to whom some insulting thing had been said. "You will go, if you please," she ended, her head high, and with a certain gesture that confounded him.

"But look a-here," he insisted, following her as she moved away from him; "Annie, look a-here; that fellow ain't a-goin' to marry anybody but a rich lady; his kind ain't goin' to marry you."

"Well, I shan't marry my kind, then! You can just understand that," she cried, with a sudden almost coarse fury. "There 's no use for you to think of such

a thing. Don't ever dare to speak to me that way again!"

This is as far as Annie Graham has lived her story. She and Dave practically summed the matter up between them: "His kind will not marry you;" and "I will not marry my kind."

The story is unfinished; one waits to see what will happen.

There are three things open to Annie: She may live out her life in South Bend; teaching, perhaps, in the public school, gradually refining the terrible little house, rejoicing Johnny's heart, and never interfering, merely for her own æsthetic necessities, with the unlovely habits of Johnny's fifty years of unlovely living; she may learn to accept his intimates as her acquaintances, his Mrs. Pugsleys and Dave Duggans as household friends, starving all the while for the companionship of her equals. Or —

She may shake off these intolerable surroundings which make her shrink as instinctively as an open eye shrinks from

dust; she may turn her back on South Bend, and the tenement house, and the painted snow-shovel, and her father's shirt-sleeves, and her father's tender heart, and go out into the world to live her own strong, refined, intellectual life, perhaps as a teacher in her old college; marrying, after a while, some one who has never seen her father, and coming into the soul-destroying possession of that skeleton in the American closet — the vulgarity of the preceding generation. Or —

She may, because of sheer misery in the struggle between the new and the old, and for the dreadful suffocating comfort of it, fall back into the pit whence she was digged and try to forget the upper air.

What is the child's duty? To live her own life, or to live some one else's life? Is she to accept success or failure, fulfillment or renunciation?

People differ as to what constitutes success; some go so far as to say that the highest fulfillment lies in renunciation; and certainly there was once a life

that might have been called a failure because it ended upon a cross on Calvary.

I suppose it all depends on how you look at it.

THE LAW, OR THE GOSPEL

I

EVERYBODY in Mercer knew Sara Wharton; in the first place, she was Edward Wharton's daughter; the Edward Wharton of the Wharton & Blair Company, whose great Rolling and Smelting Mills darken Mercer's sky with vast folds of black smoke, and give employment to two thirds of Mercer's population. In the second place, she was a very charming young lady, who was too pretty to pass unnoticed when her victoria went rolling along the river road on fine afternoons. And in the third place, she was the president of two girls' clubs, and the organizer of the Boys' Alliance, and the Young Men's Literary Association, and the founder of the Y. W. C. T. U., and the kindly autocrat of all Mercer's rough, grimy, under-fed young people. She

was a sweet-hearted, wholesome-minded, impulsive, dear child; the kind of girl who loved a party just as much, and planned her pretty dresses just as anxiously, and adored her father and mother just as unreasonably, as though she had never heard of a committee, and was indifferent to the Cause of Humanity. All Mercer knew her, and believed in her; and so when, one gray November afternoon, she was seen to go quietly up the steps of a certain house on Baker Street — a house which decent folk affected to ignore when they passed it by at midday, but at which they glanced curiously after nightfall — when Sara Wharton went into this house, those who chanced to see her said only, "Well! what won't that girl do next?"

The woman who answered her ring opened the door scarcely more than a crack, and peered out at her sourly.

"I want to see Nellie Sherman," said Miss Wharton.

"There 's no person by that name here," the woman answered.

"Let me in, please," Sara Wharton

said. She put her hand against the door, which yielded a little and then stopped; the woman inside had braced her foot against it.

"She ain't in."

"I will wait until she comes, then," returned the young lady pleasantly.

"I don't know why you 're comin' here lookin' for a girl," the woman cried out, in sudden, shrewish rage; "this is a respectable house; there 's no Sherman girl here!"

"Let me in at once," said Sara Wharton, "or I shall get a policeman, and have a warrant served. I know Nellie Sherman lives here, and I want to see her. You had better let me in without further talk. I am Miss Wharton."

"I don't care if you are Queen Victoria," the keeper of the house declared angrily; "well, you can come in, though there ain't no Nellie Sherman here; there 's a Nettie Sherman, — if she 's the girl you 're looking for."

"Tell her I want to see her, please."

"She 's up in her room. You can go up." Miss Wharton's instant's hesita-

tion made her add, "There ain't nobody there."

The halls and stairs were nearly dark; one or two frowzy heads peered over the banisters, and drew back quickly; there was a loud guffaw of laughter from behind a closed door, and all the air was heavy with the reek of stale tobacco.

"Her room 's the third floor back," the woman called up after the visitor, who went swiftly over the stairs, intent upon her errand, yet with a faint shudder, a sort of physical shrinking, that made her gather her cloak close about her, lest it might touch the wall or banisters.

"I 'm glad I told Thomas to wait," she said to herself, thinking of the brougham at the door, with the respectable, long-suffering Thomas on the box. At the third floor back she knocked, and waited for a reply; then she knocked again.

"What is it?" a muffled voice asked; "is that you, Mamie? Go 'way! I 'm busy."

"It is I; Miss Wharton; a friend of your aunt's. Let me in, Nellie." There was a breathless pause, and then a quick

step, and a bolt was snapped back. A slight, startled-looking girl stood in the doorway. Sara entered with a certain fine, regal step that she had, that gave at once a sense of the uselessness of opposing her.

"Shut the door," she commanded cheerfully, "and let me see you. Come, we will sit down and have a little talk. Oh, open that window first; there is some dreadful perfumery in the room. Ah, that 's nice; fresh air is the nicest sort of perfumery; don't you think so?"

The girl stared at her without an answer. She was a delicate-looking creature, rather pretty, except that just now her face was stained with tears, and there was a sullen look about her little pale lips. But she had fair hair in a sort of aureole around her low forehead, and shading her really beautiful eyes; and she wore a crimson silk waist, — spotted, to be sure, and ripped on the shoulder, but bringing out the fairness of her skin, and the blue veins on her delicate temples.

"I 'm sure I have n't the pleasure of

your acquaintance," she said airily; but she was trembling.

"I know your aunt, Mrs. Sherman," her visitor said; then there was a moment's silence. Sara Wharton looked about the untidy room, — with its banjo hung with ribbons, its looking-glass rimmed with cards and tintypes stuck edgewise within the frame; its litter of cigarette ends, and its half-empty, uncorked bottle of beer on the marble-topped centre-table.

"Your aunt told me about you, my child," she said, with a deep, kind look full into the girl's face.

The color rushed into Nellie's pale cheeks; but she only said, with vast indifference, "Is that so? Well, she 's very kind, I 'm sure."

"I don't know that she has always been very kind," Sara Wharton answered thoughtfully. "Now shut that window behind you; I don't want you to sit in a draft; and the fresh air has driven out the perfumery. Why do you use perfumery, Nellie? Nice girls don't."

The girl looked at her blankly.

"Yes; your aunt told me about you. She told me how she had taken care of you ever since your mother died; and how she had sent you to school, and bought pretty dresses for you, and done the housework herself so that you should n't spoil your hands; and how she took in washing so that you might go to dancing-school. She loved you very much, Nellie; but I am not sure that she was kind. Perhaps if you had had to work you would n't have come to this dreadful house, and brought shame and disgrace to Mrs. Sherman. You 've broken her heart, Nellie."

The girl's face paled and flushed; and then quivered suddenly into a storm of tears.

"*I* don't like it here. But I can't help it. I lost my place in the shop. I was late, and they discharged me. And I was afraid to go home and tell my aunt, she jaws at me so. That was four weeks ago. It was the third place I 'd lost. So I — came here. I don't like it. I was just crying when you came in!" She squeezed her handkerchief into a damp

ball and pressed it against her eyes, sobbing. "The woman is so cross. And — and I owe her for board."

Sara was silent.

"But there ain't anything I can do; I'd die rather than go back to my aunt's. She'd never forgive me. I don't blame her. But *I* don't like it here."

"Perhaps your aunt will forgive you?" Sara said gently. Nellie rocked back and forth, sobbing.

"I'm too wicked," she recited; her eyes roved over Sara's dark dress, and inspected her pretty little bonnet, and dwelt on the glitter of an amethyst pin at her throat. "Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't; I wish I was dead," she said helplessly.

Sara Wharton's face lit with a quick tenderness. She put her arm over the child's bent shoulders, and drew the wet cheek down against her breast. "My dear, if you are sorry, if you know that it is wicked and dreadful, then the worst is over. Don't wish to die — wish to live, so that you may be good. I know you *can* be good!" she ended, with a burst of

courage in her voice, that struck some answering chord in the poor, half-developed little soul at her side. Nellie looked up.

"Oh, I will be good — if I can just get out of here! I'm just about sick, anyway; I've got such a pain under my left shoulder; and I'm just tired of it — and Mrs. Smith is so cross. But I can't go home. My aunt'll jaw at me. Oh, I can't ever go home!" She whimpered a little, and looked at her pretty finger nails critically.

"I'm *sure* your aunt will forgive you!" Sara said, impetuous and tender. "Let's go and ask her to, now."

"Mrs. Smith won't let me go, I guess," Nellie sighed; "I owe her two weeks board."

"I will pay her."

"I'll come to-morrow," the child demurred.

"Nellie, dear, I want you to come now! Oh, Nellie, won't you begin this minute to be good?"

"I'm not so very bad," Nellie protested, "and I can't come now, truly. I

have n't any sack. I — sold it." The tears welled up in her soft eyes at the remembrance of her poverty.

"You don't need a sack. You 'll come in my carriage, and I 'll wrap a rug around you."

"My!" said Nellie, "is your carriage here? One of the club girls told me it had satin cushions. Is that so, Miss Wharton?"

Sara bit her lip. "Never mind about the cushions. Oh, Nellie, dear, don't think of things like that! Only just try with all your might to be good. Will you, Nellie?"

"Why, certainly," said Nellie.

Sara Wharton drove home with a very serious look on her face. She had induced Nellie to leave that dreadful house; indeed, the girl had yielded with that fatally facile willingness to do what she was told which should have forbade any of the joy that may be felt over the one sinner that repenteth. But in the glow of "saving" the poor child, it was not easy for Sara Wharton to realize that

Nellie's first experience of sin had only reached the stage of the young smoker's disgust with his first cigar. The young lady, with her carriage and her satin cushions, had come at the right moment — the moment when the expediency of morality had forced itself upon the girl's little, flimsy common-sense, and she was willing to go shuddering back to comfortable decency; but as for any spiritual perception of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, it did not exist.

Nellie had received her aunt's forgiveness as though she were conferring a favor. Indeed, she sighed with some impatience when Mrs. Sherman wept over her; and she said again, fretfully, in response to Miss Wharton's assertions that *now* Nellie was going to be good, — "Why certainly, yes;" and looked about wearily, as if she wished the scene might come to an end.

"Nobody shan't never know, my darling," Mrs. Sherman told her, her voice breaking with tenderness; "I 'll say you 've been away, visiting friends."

"A' right," said Nellie. And neither

the aunt nor the niece understood Miss Wharton's quick protest against trying to hide one sin by another.

Sara, driving home, tired and saddened by the emotions of the afternoon, acknowledged to herself that the easy repentance was made of still less value by the easy forgiveness.

"But some day she will repent, really and truly," she told herself; but she sighed, and dropped the window of the brougham, leaning forward to get the dash of wet, cold wind in her face. It seemed to her as though she still felt the lifeless air of those horrible halls and stairways, and the scent of musk, and tobacco smoke, and stale liquor.

"The only thing to do, the only way to save her is to love her," Sara Wharton said to herself, "and I 'm going to love her!"

When she reached home, and came in out of the cold dusk into the firelit hall, this divine intention of loving shone on her face with a beautiful solemnity. Her seriousness was so marked that her mother, who was just saying good even-

ing to a departing caller, noticed it and said, with some anxiety: —

"My dear, there is nothing the matter, I hope?"

"No, mother darling," the girl reassured her, with a glance at the tall fellow who stood with his hat and stick in his hand, waiting for Mrs. Wharton's bow.

"Sara, my dear, this is Dr. Morse. My daughter, Dr. Morse."

"I ventured to come and tell a sad story to your mother, Miss Wharton," said the young man, "a dispensary story. I've just come on duty at the dispensary; but Mrs. Wharton's kindness was so proverbial, that when I stumbled on a hard case, I came at once to tell her about it."

"I've no doubt she was delighted to hear of it," Sara said; "mother would really be dreadfully unhappy if everybody was prosperous; her occupation would be gone."

"Why, Sara! Sara! you must n't say such things," Mrs. Wharton reproved her, looking at her daughter over her gold spectacles, with the horrified protest of a simple and literal mind.

The other two laughed, feeling suddenly very well acquainted.

"So long as she lives in Mercer, Mrs. Wharton's happiness is assured," the doctor said; and went away, saying to himself, "What a girl! I don't wonder people rave about her; she's stunning! But I'm afraid she's a professional philanthropist."

"So that's the new doctor?" Sara said, pulling off her gloves; "he has a nice face, rather. Did you like him, darling?"

"Yes," her mother answered doubtfully, "only, Sara, my dear, he seems rather a stern young man. I wanted to give him a check for this poor woman he came to tell me about; but he said that I must let her clean windows, or something, to earn it. And you know, my dear child, that would interfere with James's work. I'd much rather give the check than arrange for work."

Sara kissed her, and cuddled her, for Mrs. Wharton was a little, roly-poly, comfortable sort of woman, and told her she was behind the times.

"Nowadays," announced the young lady, "the 'gave to him that asketh' method is hopelessly unscientific; bless your dear old-fashioned heart!"

II

The saving of Nellie Sherman became an intense and passionate purpose in Sara Wharton's life. Day by day, hour by hour, she watched and fought and prayed. She invented (according to the most approved charity methods) work for the vain and shiftless child; she had her taught to sew; she was careful to provide plenty of bright and wholesome amusement for her; by and by Nellie felt yearnings to be a bookkeeper, and Sara Wharton sent her to a commercial school. "You can pay me back when you get work," she said, as cheerfully as though she believed that Nellie was capable of feeling a money obligation. She entered Nellie's name at her Girls' Club; she took her to concerts, and sent her books, and planned and thought and hoped; and always, always prayed. Fur-

thermore, she loved the girl. That is to say, she called it love; and perhaps it was, in its way; at least it was that greater love that is content to give and not receive. Sara gave her very self — her power, her charm, her sweet and generous enthusiasms — fully and freely into the little, mean hands that were held out to take all they could get. "Because," she said to herself, again, "the only way to reach her is to love her. Love is the greatest thing in the world! I 've no doubt I would have been just as bad as Nellie if I had n't had so much love." This thought made the girl rise, and go and push her mother's sewing aside, and kiss her, with a little half laughing break in her voice, and her eyes suddenly wet with tears.

"What is it? What is it?" Mrs. Wharton said breathlessly, adjusting her spectacles, which the impetuous embrace had disturbed; "is anything the matter, Sara?"

"No," her daughter answered, with a laugh, winking away the tears, "I was just thinking how lucky I was to have

you for a mother, you darling! If I'd had some cross old mother I should have been — I should have been a fiend! I have n't a doubt of it. I 'd have been just as wicked as poor Nellie Sherman."

"Nothing of the sort!" retorted Mrs. Wharton, much ruffled; "please remember what kind of people your grand-parents on both sides were, and don't say such unladylike things, Sara. Dear, dear, I don't know what girls are coming to in these days. When I was young, young ladies did n't know that such improper persons existed as your Nellie Sherman. I wish you would have nothing to do with her."

Sara, on her knees beside the little, rosy, kindly lady, pulled her cap straight, and scolded her for making her forefinger rough with so much sewing.

"You are always making petticoats for poor people," she said severely, "instead of talking to me about my winter clothes. I want a new dinner dress, ma'am, and you 've got to buy it. I 've used up all my allowance, and borrowed from father on the next quarter; so please help the

deserving poor of your own household. Charity begins at home, let me tell you! Who is to have this petticoat? — while your own poor child is in want of a satin gown!"

"Well," Mrs. Wharton said, with some confusion, "the fact is, Nellie looks so sickly I am afraid she is not warmly enough clad" —

Sara shrieked with laughter. "Consistency, thy name is Mother," she cried; and began to pour out her plans for Nellie, which Mrs. Wharton amended several times, objecting to Sara's assertion that Nellie should repay the money expended for her tuition at the commercial college.

"The poor thing will have so little money, anyhow," she entreated. But Sara held to her theory.

"We 'll make it up in other ways, — petticoats, and things, but she must feel it a loan," she said.

However, Miss Wharton's theories were far too fine for the material with which she worked. When the three terms at the commercial college were

over, Nellie was languidly grateful, but she doubted whether she should like bookkeeping; she was, however, willing to "give it a trial;" so Sara found a place in a shop for her, and, as the proprietor (another friend and dependent) could not pay the full wages, made up the sum herself. But it never occurred to Nellie to begin to pay her debt; and Sara, fearful of antagonizing the child, cast her theory to the winds, and did not suggest it.

So the first year passed. The anxious, courageous, artificial fight never flagged; and Nellie, for twelve months, was "straight." There had been great expenditure of time and strength and money to save the little creature; and in a purely negative way the effort had been successful. Nellie was "straight."

Yet Sara Wharton was sometimes dreadfully discouraged; she could not see a single large or noble trait in the girl, although it was her sweet and loving theory to believe in what she did not see.

"Goodness is there, somewhere!" she used to say to herself, with a beautiful

and courageous belief which was part of her own character; and then she fell back on what she had called "the greatest thing in the world:" "Goodness is there, and I've got to *love it out!*" She took Nellie's latent goodness for granted, especially in her effort to overcome the child's enveloping selfishness. She was constantly trying to make her realize the happiness of sacrifice.

"Nellie," she said once, "now that you've got your place as bookkeeper, and are earning some money, of course you want to pay me; but I think, even before that, you must want to pay for your board at your aunt's. She has been so good to you, you know; and I'm sure you'll be glad to help her along a little?"

"Oh, certainly!" Nellie replied, with a blank look.

"How much do you think you can pay?" Sara suggested cheerfully.

"Well, just now," Nellie demurred, "I really have to have a new dress; perhaps, later, I can give her a little something."

Sara looked at her wistfully. "Don't you *want* to, Nellie? I should think your very first thought would be to do something for her. Just think what she has done for you!"

"Of course, I mean to," Nellie said, tossing her head, "but I've got to have a dress — and things."

"If only," Sara reflected, "she could once understand how awfully nice it is to give!" and then she planned that every Saturday Nellie might come to the greenhouse and get some roses from the gardener, — "and take them to the hospital. It is delightful to do that!" she said. And Nellie smiled faintly, and said, "Oh, certainly;" but only came once for the flowers.

Nevertheless, Nellie Sherman had been "rescued." Almost the same sort of rescue would have been achieved if Sara had fastened her into a strait-jacket and locked her into a room. But with Miss Wharton on one side, and her aunt on the other, day and night, the strange, boneless, unmoral little nature "kept straight;" and in a glimmering way the

girl even began to see that there were certain views which were thought admirable, and once in a while she tried them on, as it were, and regarded herself in the mirror of Miss Wharton's warm and joyous approbation.

"I was so sorry not to see you at the club last night, Nellie," Sara said to her one day, dropping in to buy a pair of gloves at the shop where Nellie kept the books.

"My aunt was n't well," said Nellie, "and I stayed at home to take care of her." Such a light came into Sara Wharton's sweet face, such tenderness and triumph and quick hope, that Nellie looked at her curiously.

"That was right, Nellie, dear," she said; "I 'm so glad you did it. I 'm *so* glad," she repeated, and went away, her eyes misty and her heart lifted up. She could not help going in to see Mrs. Sherman, making the excuse of bringing her some fruit because she was ill, but really to share her exultation.

"Sick?" said Mrs. Sherman, "why, no, ma'am, I 'm not sick, no more than I

always am with worry about that there Nellie. She did n't come home from the club last night until after eleven, and I was scared to death for fear she 'd gone off with them Caligan girls — they 're fast girls, that 's what they are; and she 's struck up a great friendship with 'em. My, she 'll worry me into my grave, Nellie will. But she said you 'd kept her late to help you putting away the club books, — and of course that was all right."

III

"You owe something to your family, my child," Mrs. Wharton said one day; "you make us all very anxious and worried by overworking so; it 's your duty to take a little rest."

"Mother, darling," Sara began to protest, "I really can't go away now; the Girls' Club and " —

"You need n't begin the list, my dear," her mother interrupted — "I know them all. Dear, dear! Sara, when I was a girl, young women owed some duties to

their parents, as well as to all the shiftless, worthless, improper people in the world."

"I trust I'm not a Borrioboola-Gha person," murmured Sara.

"Don't be foolish, my child," Mrs. Wharton said, "and use long words when your poor old mother don't know what they mean" —

"You darling!" said Sara, and hugged her so tightly that Mrs. Wharton remonstrated.

"It would be a great deal more to the point if, instead of kissing me, you would be an obedient child. You worry me almost to death, working so hard. I want you to come to Florida. I asked Dr. Morse if he did n't think you were doing too much, and he said you took a great deal of unnecessary trouble; so you see he agrees with me."

"Mother, dear, how you adore doctors! Dr. Morse does n't know what he 's talking about. But you might tell me what else he said?"

"Oh, some nonsense about — about your being of so much value to Mercer," Mrs. Wharton admitted, with evident

fear that one statement might lessen the effect of the other.

But whether it was Dr. Morse's understanding of the value of her work, or whether it was her mother's entreaties, Sara at last agreed to go away for a little while, though it was hard work to get things in running order for a three months' absence of their head. Nellie was her greatest anxiety; three months without oversight and guidance — who could tell what might happen! So Sara made many plans; the girl was to be guarded on this side and on that: she was to have steady work, and she was to have frequent amusement; pleasure and profit were all arranged. And before she went, Sara had a little talk with her. She had sent for the girl, who came up into her bedroom, where, just before dinner, Miss Wharton was sitting in the firelight. The pretty room was full of dusky shadows; its faint scent of roses, its deep, soft chairs, the shimmer of silver on the toilet-table, all its delicate luxury, was evident enough to Nellie. The sullen upper lip swelled out as she looked en-

viously about her. She liked the touch of the silk cushions, the feeling of the soft white rug under her feet; the color of Miss Wharton's crimson tea-gown fed her eyes with delight. She hardly heard what the young lady was saying.

"Nellie, dear, I want you to try your very best to be good while I 'm away."

"Oh, certainly," said Nellie, with a sigh.

Sara clasped her hands together over her knees, and held her lip between her teeth, drawing in her breath; Nellie watched her rings wink and flash in the firelight.

"Nellie" (Sara was saying to herself, "Oh, I *hope* I will say what is wise. I *hope* I can touch her!"), "Nellie, you know how I have always believed in you, and hoped for you, and loved you; and just because I have, and because I am truly, truly your friend, I want to ask you to do two things for me while I 'm away: first, promise me not to tell another lie; oh, Nellie, you don't know how unhappy you made me when you told me that lie about the club."

Nellie dropped her head upon her breast, and made no answer.

"And then," Sara went on, "I want you to try not to be so selfish. I am so grieved to have you indifferent to Mrs. Sherman's kindness to you. She told me that you had only given her one dollar and seventy-five cents since you went to work. And don't you see, you have been receiving everything she could give you, of love and care, and yet you have given her nothing! You have n't even been kind to her, Nellie."

"*Oh!*" said Nellie, "well, I wish I was dead. Everybody 's always finding fault. I 'm sure there 's lots of girls worse than me. But I 'm always being picked at. I wish I was dead."

Sara was nervous and overstrained; besides, she was conscious of a sort of physical disgust at this poor, repulsive little being; her self-reproach brought the tears to her eyes. "I did n't mean to be hard on you, Nellie," she said, "only I want you to try."

"I *always* try," said Nellie.

"And," Sara's brave young voice went

on, "I do want you to feel that — that Christ cares; that God cares, Nellie, that you shall be a good, true, dear girl. Will you just think of that, Nellie?"

"Why, of course," Nellie answered resentfully, wiping her eyes. "I do always. My aunt makes me go to church every Sunday. Miss Sara, do you think you have any pieces of velvet in your rag-bag?"

Sara started. "Rag-bag?" she repeated vaguely, "velvet?"

"I thought I could trim my hat over," Nellie explained. "You 've got so many things," she ended sullenly.

Sara was silent for a few minutes, reasoning with herself. After all, Nellie was young; it was natural for her to like pretty things.

"Yes, I can give you some velvet, I think," she said cheerfully; "and, Nellie, I have a plan for you; what are you going to give your aunt for a Christmas gift?"

Nellie looked up blankly.

"I know you 'll want to give her something," Sara went on, "and I was think-

ing of a nice chair. What do you think of that?"

"A chair!" repeated Nellie in astonishment. "Why, I would n't buy a chair for myself!"

Sara sighed. "But you would like the fun of buying one for somebody else, would n't you?"

"Well, I ain't got any money," the girl said uneasily; and then Miss Wharton unfolded her plan, which was that she should give Nellie five dollars, and Nellie would add what she could, and a present should be purchased.

"Add something, if it 's only a dollar," Sara said pleadingly; "a good, comfortable chair can be bought for six dollars."

"A' right; I don't mind," Nellie agreed, in a wearied way. She did not understand all this talk; she saw no reason in Miss Sara's giving Mrs. Sherman a chair, and saying it was Nellie's gift; still, she did n't mind.

"You 'll like to do that, won't you, Nellie?" Sara said anxiously.

"Oh, certainly," said Nellie, and then

she rose, for Miss Wharton was silent, and that seemed a sign of dismissal.

Sara rose, too, and stood looking at her visitor for a moment; then, suddenly she put her arm around the little thin shoulders, and drew the girl to her, and kissed her. "Oh, Nellie," she said, her voice passionate and trembling, — "Oh, Nellie, *dear!* I — I wish I knew what to say, to show you — to make you feel" — her voice broke; Nellie was greatly embarrassed; — "but just believe *I love you*, won't you? and be good!"

"Why," said Nellie, with a sigh of fatigue and reproach, "certainly!" Then she added, "Well, good-by; hope you 'll have a delightful time, I 'm sure," and closed Miss Sara's door, with a sense of relief that was like the lifting of some harassing weight. She came slowly downstairs, pulling on her soiled gloves, and walking with a mincing step. Escaped from Miss Wharton's room, she felt as if all the luxury of this great house — the color, the lights, the soft carpet under her feet, the sparkle of the firelight in the hall below — was hers, and

so she assumed the gait and the manner which she conceived to belong to an owner. The inside-man was just lighting a lamp under a big rose-colored shade, and Nellie threw up her head with a haughty look, and drew down the corners of her mouth, sweeping past him toward the door. James, however, smiled with great politeness.

"Oh, g'd evening, Miss Sherman," he said. "My! it does seem to get dark early these days, does n't it?"

Nellie's lofty coldness melted instantly. She simpered and said, "Is that so?"

"It 's quite late for a young lady to be out alone," James remarked with grave solicitude.

"Oh, that 's a' right," Nellie protested.

She was smiling, and holding her head coquettishly, and looking up at him with great archness. She dropped her handkerchief as she reached the front door and James picked it up, and handed it to her with an elaborate bow. He caught her fingers in his own as he did so, and they both giggled, and Nellie said, "Now, you stop that!"

They lowered their voices with an apprehensive look towards the staircase; James opened the door and stepped out on the porch with her. "Well, you ought n't to be severe, Miss Sherman; it 's such a little hand, a gentleman can't help it; Miss Sara's is twice as big."

"Is that so?" said Nellie; and then they both looked up at the sky, and James observed that the weather was threatening, and it certainly *was* too dark for a young lady, a beautiful young lady, to be out alone.

"Oh, that 's a' right," Nellie reassured him politely.

James in an absent-minded way put his arm round her, and said he thought ladies ought always to have gentlemen escorts.

"Is that so?" Nellie answered, simpering; and, with the same apparent absence of mind, sidling closer to him, which induced his easy caresses; "well, I must be going along," she announced, giggling.

"Well, good-by, Miss Sherman," said the chivalrous James, and gave her a

hearty kiss, which made Nellie slap at him with one hand, and say, "Now you stop that!" and go off, still giggling, into the darkness.

. . . . . .

Sara Wharton, upstairs by her fire, had dropped her face in her hands, and was saying to herself, "I must trust her more, and believe in her more! Oh, I am sure she tries — poor little Nellie."

And certainly poor Nellie was not conscious of any lack of trying, so far as the episode with James was concerned. To her, as well as to him, it was very harmless, that kiss in the porch. And really to call such a thing "sin" is to lift it to a level where it does not belong.

But probably Sara Wharton was constitutionally unable to understand that.

The people who try to make silk purses out of inadequate materials rarely can understand it.

IV

The Whartons did not get back until April, and the improvement in Sara's color, and the clear, glad look in her

eyes, showed how much she had needed the change. She was all ready for her brave, happy work for other people. Her very first visit was to Nellie's aunt. When she climbed up to the top tenement, stopping to open a window on a landing half way up, so that the sweet spring air might turn out the odors of the hall-sink, and of the dirt in the corners and on the stairs, she came into Mrs. Sherman's room a little breathless, but with a soft rose-color on her cheek.

"Well!" she called out cheerfully, "here I am again, Mrs. Sherman; how are you; and how is Nellie?" and then she discovered Nellie sitting close to the stove, on which was a tin boiler full of steaming soapy linen, which Mrs. Sherman, bare armed and draggled, pushed down once in a while with a broom-handle.

"There!" said Mrs. Sherman, "well! my sakes, Miss Wharton, it do do me good to see you. Look at that there girl!"

Nellie sunk her head on her breast and began to cry. Sara was instantly seri-

ous. "Is anything wrong?" she said gravely.

"Wrong!" cried Mrs. Sherman shrilly. "Well, I guess! I told her I 'd keep her till you come home, though she 's a shame to any decent woman. My! what I 've put up with for that there child!" She put her apron over her head, sobbing and vociferating: "I told her I 'd tell you. I ain't let her out of that door since. I 'll keep her straight now, as long as *I* live" —

Nellie, her face drawn and pale, sat plucking at the fringe of the shawl about her shoulders, her sullen lips compressed, her eyes cast resolutely down.

"Nellie?" Sara said. There was no answer.

"What has happened, Nellie?"

Silence.

"Tell me; I won't be hard on you, Nellie. Have you — gone wrong again?"

Nellie crossed her feet and made no reply.

In despair Sara turned again to Mrs. Sherman, who, with tears, declaring first that Nellie should leave her house that

night, and then that she would never let her out of her sight, told the shameful fact of another fall; — another reformation.

"She 's sick, that 's what 's the matter; that 's all her reformin' amounts to," the aunt said; "she was bleedin' from her lungs, so she come home. She was gone a week. It was two weeks last Thursday she come back. Well, I thought she was dyin'. I was up with her three nights. I sent for that there doctor at the dispensary. He give her some stuff. That 's it in the bottle on the mantel. Well, I did n't let on to him how she 'd been carryin' on! Shame on her! I 'm done with her. She can go out to the gutter. That 's where she belongs" —

"Oh, Mrs. Sherman," Sara protested, her color coming and going. "Nellie, how could you! oh, Nellie!" She looked over at the girl with a sort of passionate disappointment and pity, yet with that physical shrinking which the good woman feels in the presence of the bad woman. With illness Nellie's vanity had ebbed; she was untidy, her hands were dirty;

she had not frizzed her hair for days, and it hung about her dull face in lifeless strands.

"Well," Mrs. Sherman burst out, "there! She 's broke my heart. Nellie, it 's time for your medicine. She ain't got no appetite, Miss Wharton. I don't know what I *shall* do!" The woman's worn face quivered with tears. Nellie got up and took her medicine; she glanced at the hem of Miss Wharton's skirt, but would not lift her eyes any higher. The clothes on the stove boiled, and the suds splashed over and sizzled on the hot iron. Mrs. Sherman, talking and crying, rammed them down with the clothes-stick.

"I could n't believe it at first. She 'd kep' straight for more 'an a year an' a half. But she got to goin' with a lot o' them fast girls, and she spent every cent she had on her back" —

Sara looked around suddenly. "Did she give you a present of a chair at Christmas?"

"A chair? No; she never gave me nothing. Not a thing. You told her

she 'd got to pay me board. I 'd 'a' been satisfied with that, and not 'a' wanted no presents of chairs. Well, I took her out of her dyin' mother's arms, and I 've lived to see the day I wished she 'd a-died then, with my poor, blessed sister. *She* made a misstep, I will say; and the man made off and left her. But she was expectin' to marry him. It was different from this one. *I 've* been a respectable woman all my life, and I can't stand the shame of this, — the neighbors 'll know," she rambled on, crying and jabbing at the steaming clothes, and looking with furtive, dumb love at the little, sick, mean face on the other side of the stove.

As for Sara Wharton, she went home heart-sick, but gathering up her courage and her faith for further effort; this time to save the body as well as the soul.

The first thing to be done was, plainly, to see the doctor at the dispensary, who had already examined Nellie.

"I 'll have to tell him the truth about her," Sara thought, frowning. But it never occurred to her to shirk this.

"Yes, I remember the case, I think,"

said Dr. Morse; "incipient phthisis, I believe. Just let me look it up; yes, that was it; anæmia, also; I gave her a tonic."

"Phthisis?" Sara repeated, her color paling. "Oh, Dr. Morse, does n't that mean — consumption?"

"Not yet," he answered, with all the cheerfulness of scientific indifference. "It will doubtless develop into consumption."

"But that means she will *die?*" Sara said, her dark eyes full of fear. "Oh, is it as bad as that?" Her lip trembled. The young man looked at her with attention.

"I am sorry I told you so abruptly; I did not realize that the young woman was anything to you, personally; and I assure you the case is not hopeless."

"Is there any hope? Oh, Dr. Morse, it is so awful to think of her dying *now!* What must be done? How uneven things are! There was I, a strong, well woman, down in Florida, and this poor girl" —

"There is perhaps some difference in the value of the two lives," the doctor

objected, smiling. Sara brushed this aside as unworthy of an answer.

"What can we do?"

"Well, I suppose if she could go away into the country, and live a quiet, regular life, with plenty of milk to drink, and plenty of fresh air and proper exercise, she would at least be greatly benefited. Possibly cured. There are no marked lesions, I think, in the lung."

Sara listened with frowning intentness; then she drew a long breath of relief. "I am so thankful that it is not hopeless. But I think that — that in prescribing for her, I mean planning for her, you ought to know — all there is to know, about her."

"Yes, that is advisable," the doctor agreed easily. The charming color of her cheek, the bunch of violets on her shoulder, her beautiful, troubled brown eyes, were not lost upon this young man. "I thought her a vain little thing," he went on, "and rather brutal to the good woman who was taking care of her. But illness makes us all selfish."

"I am afraid she is vain, poor child,"

Sara said, "and selfish, too, rather. But the worst of it is, she has — she has not been good, Dr. Morse."

"Ah!" said the young man.

"I did hope she had reformed, but while I was away — it happened again."

"I see. I see."

"Of course, in sending her away that has to be considered. She must be among people who will do her good."

"And to whom she will not do harm."

Sara looked a little startled. "Of course; but I had not thought of that."

"It seems to me that is very important," he said, smiling. "Speaking of sending people away, I wish I might tell you of another case which needs the country; or are your hands too full to consider any one else?"

"Alas, it is my purse which is not full," she said ruefully; "but is it very bad?"

"It is a poor soul, a hard-working, honest little creature, who has an old mother and an imbecile brother to support; and she's nearly at an end of her strength. She needs to be braced up."

"I wish I could send her away too," Sara said pitifully; "but I've begged and begged for my cases until, positively, I haven't the face to ask for any more money. My friends fly when they see me approaching, for fear I'm going to say 'give, give!'" She laughed a little, and the doctor looked at her with critical amusement.

"But of the two, you'd give the — you'd give Nellie Sherman the chance for health?"

"Why, it's only 'bracing up' that your poor woman needs," Sara said, with a surprised look, "and you say Nellie will die if she does n't go away?"

"Perhaps that would be the best thing that could happen."

"Dr. Morse! Would you have me let Nellie Sherman *die*, that three people should be made comfortable?"

"I would, indeed," he said, with a whimsical smile.

She looked at him in silent dismay, and he thought she shrank a little.

"My dear Miss Wharton," he said quickly, "just look at the situation:

your poor Nellie is a moral leper; she is a contagion; she's had her opportunity to get well (I speak spiritually); she has had a year and a half of the most patient and earnest effort expended upon her; but she has n't profited by it, and the probability is she is incurable. On the other hand, here is a woman who is a centre and source of moral health. Each needs physical restoration: one for her life, the other for her usefulness, — and, later, no doubt, her life, too. To which shall the chance be given?"

"To the one who might die!" Sara said impetuously.

She got up to go, a sparkle of indignation in her eyes; the young man rose, too, and stood leaning back against his office table, his hands in his pockets, and a good-natured smile on his lean, strong face. "I don't see," his visitor went on, "how you dare to say any soul is incurably bad" —

"I only said the *probability* was that your Nellie was incurable; and, after all, if you have only a certain amount of medicine, will you give it to the mori-

bund or the person who is just coming down with an illness?"

"I don't think the illustration is good," Sara answered loftily; "we are speaking of souls. And we have no right to say we know the limit" — her voice fell a little — "of God's power."

Dr. Morse looked as though he were about to speak, but apparently thought better of it.

"I 'm very sorry for your poor woman," Sara said, "and I 'll try to see if I can't arrange a little rest for her; but first of all, life must be saved."

Then she went away, her lip between her white teeth, and her breath quick. "Horrible man!" she said to herself, "the idea of reasoning about a thing like that — a human life! Dreadful person! I hope I shall never see him again."

Dr. Morse, in his office, thrust his hands down into his pockets, and stretched his feet out, and reflected. "I suppose she thinks I 'm a brute. I might have known better than to talk to a sentimental girl as though she were a rational being. She 'll keep that creature alive long

enough to bring two or three fellows down to the gutter, and, possibly, even continue her physical and moral characteristics in a child (though that's not likely, thank heaven), and then feel that she's done *her* duty! Good Lord, the harm these philanthropists do!"

Nevertheless he softened a little when a short and formal note came from Miss Wharton, with a small sum of money for "the case of which he had spoken."

"She's got a good heart, that girl," he told himself. "Her ten dollars won't do much, though; and to think of that little squalid Nellie Sherman having a hundred spent to keep her worthless body alive!"

V

So Nellie's summer outing was arranged: she was to have four months in a quiet place in the country; plenty of fresh air, and good milk, and wholesome food.

No wonder the little pale cheeks grew round and faintly pink; that her eyes seemed darker and brighter; her pinched,

white lips fuller and redder. In a month it was evident that the quiet life which Sara had taken such pains to find was good for her; her whole miserable, sickly body began to thrive. It was a "quiet" life. From the girl's point of view it was perfectly intolerable. She endured, in her way, the misery of the intellectual man or woman cut off absolutely from books or study of any kind, or of a clean person obliged to live in filth. The contrast was as great. The fact that it was in favor of righteousness did not make it any the less painful. Nellie's sudden removal from the cheap and base excitements of her life caused absolute suffering. Such suffering, untempted reformers argue, is good for the soul.

But to Nellie the sweet drift of silent summer days was maddeningly dull; she brooded over what she felt was the hardship of her lot, and looked back upon her Mercer life as a time of freedom, and of a strange sort of importance, — which was as near self-respect as she could come. At least, in Mercer she was not "trod on," as she now felt herself to be; she

could go and walk the street on fine afternoons with the Caligan girls, three abreast, arm in arm, strutting and jostling each other, and looking into the shop windows; laughing loudly, or glancing haughtily at the passers-by, or giggling at "gentlemen friends." It was all so harmless and so pleasant! Of course, Mrs. Smith's on Baker Street, that was different; but just to meet lady and gentlemen friends, and talk and "carry on" — what was wrong in that? She did, to be sure, feel nervous about her health; but if it were necessary to go into the country, why could n't she have gone to a hotel, where she could have had some fun? It seemed a cruel life to Nellie! She came to feel toward Sara Wharton, instead of the uncomfortable resentment which in such natures takes the place of gratitude, a venomous hatred. Sara seemed to this poor, mean soul, a powerful enemy, one who interfered with every joy, and, not content with that, who "talked;" and Nellie hated talk. Like most of her class, except when in a rage, she had little to say beyond ex-

clamations, and Miss Wharton's impetuous flow of words, her entreaties, and rebukes, and suggestions, had only bewildered and irritated the girl; for Sara, like most of her class, had never taken Nellie's mental deficiencies into account; she treated her always like a rational being. Like a "Soul," Sara herself would have said.

So, up on the farm, as her fright about her health subsided, poor Nellie raged against her benefactor and her cruel fate. She fell into fits of weeping, or, what was worse to the quiet husband and wife in whose charge she was, into long silences, broken only by fitful flashes of black temper. Yet in spite of this, her bodily health increased. Very likely there would have been open rebellion, and a break for liberty by midsummer, if an unexpected interest had not come into her life. Two students, with their tutor, came to camp out near the farm; and after passing them once or twice in the road, and giggling with them over the posting of a letter in the office, poor Nellie grew better tempered. She frizzed her

hair with keener enjoyment, and practiced airs and graces before her glass all the long hot forenoons; and in the afternoons walked in to the village on the remote chance of meeting the two boys. She did not see them often, but to know they were near gave her something to think about in the deadly monotony of farm life, and she was much happier. On the rare occasions of their meeting she would roll her eyes, and talk in her simpering, nasal voice of the weather, or the novel she had been reading, or how her "guardian" had sent her into the country for her health. The boys said to each other that she was pretty, and ripping good fun; and used to laugh over her silliness with their tutor. They were too busy and too wholesomely happy to give very much thought to her.

Thus the summer passed. The health which Sara Wharton so earnestly desired had returned, temporarily at least. When at last the first of September came, and Miss Wharton's letter arrived to say she might come home, — such a gentle, friendly, sympathetic letter, — Nellie was

wild with delight. She could hardly remember to say good-by to the kind people who had looked after her for the last few months; she almost forgot the boys; she was tremulous with joy.

"Oh, I'm so *glad* to go back — oh, I hate, hate, *hate* the country!" she kept saying; while the husband and wife looked at each other wonderingly.

So, strengthened and invigorated, panting for excitement, unchecked by any moral perceptions, by gratitude, by love, even by fear (now that she was well again), — she came back to Mercer.

VI

One night in December, Sara Wharton, coming home from a dinner, was told that Dr. Morse was waiting for her in the library. She went in at once, pulling off her long gloves, and with her white cloak falling back from her pretty shoulders. She had not seen the doctor since that talk about Nellie, and she had forgotten her indignation with him. She had heard too much of his goodness

among the poor people to harbor resentment.

"Oh, I am so sorry to be so late," she said. "Have you been waiting very long? Oh, this room is cold! Why have n't they kept the fire up?" She turned, with a pretty, hospitable impulse to summon a servant, but Dr. Morse stopped her with a gesture.

"I am quite warm. I will only detain you for a few moments. I want you to help me."

"Indeed, I will; has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes," he said, with a hard look.

"One of your poor people?" she asked. She sat down by the fire, one silken foot on the fender; her cloak had slipped down behind her, and she was pulling out her gloves, and smoothing them on her knee. She looked up at him with a charming smile.

"Yes," he said, "one of my poor people — and yours. Miss Wharton, can you tell me anything about Nellie Sherman?"

"Nellie?" Sara Wharton's face began

to change. "Oh, Dr. Morse, I wish I could tell you anything encouraging about her. She quarreled with her aunt, and went to work at a factory in North Mercer. She hardly ever comes home, I 'm sorry to say; she is boarding with a respectable family, I believe, and I think she does not depend on Mrs. Sherman for any money. But I 've lost my hold on her — if I ever had any! She has only been to see me once since she came home in September. You know I sent her away in the summer? And she got well, Dr. Morse!" she ended triumphantly.

"Yes; she did," he said with stern significance.

"What is the matter? Is she sick again? is she — *dead?*"

"Dead? I wish she were."

"Dr. Morse!"

"Miss Wharton, that miserable creature has lived long enough to corrupt and seduce an innocent boy. Young Jack Hayes has — I beg your pardon, this is plain talk — but I am a physician and you are — a philanthropist, so we need

not mince words, — Jack has gone off with her. I have come to-night from his mother's bedside. Mrs. Hayes has just heard what he has done — her innocent boy."

Sara rose, shrinking and wincing as though he had struck her.

"I thought it possible," he went on, "that you might know where she was living, and perhaps I could get on her track. She met Jack up in the country; he was there with a tutor; of course, she had no difficulty in finding him when he came back to town. He went off with her on Sunday, we think — at least, one of the Clay boys saw him with her Sunday night, and he has n't been at home since."

"I don't know where she is," Sara said brokenly.

"I went to see Mrs. Sherman before I came here, and do you know what she said to me? She sat, poor woman, with the tears streaming down her cheeks: 'Oh,' she said, 'if I could only know she was dead! If she was just safe in her grave!'"

Sara shivered.

"I thought to myself, 'She would be, you poor soul, if some of us wise people had not interfered.' I reproach myself," he went on savagely, "that I did not try to dissuade you when you told me you meant to keep the girl alive. We ought to stamp such vermin out — or let it die out, at least. Instead, you philanthropists and we doctors do all we can to keep them alive, — that they may propagate their kind! Fortunately, nature generally prevents that, — but Nellie's mother was a fallen woman, you may remember? Poor Jack — poor Mrs. Hayes! Miss Wharton, our hands are not innocent of that boy's blood."

Sara was very white; she still trembled, but she lifted her head and looked full at him. "Dr. Morse, are you God, to kill?"

"Or you, to make alive?" he interrupted. "I did not ask you to kill — I asked you not to interfere — to allow God to work in his own way. I asked you to use that judgment which, in ordinary affairs, is so excellent — to consider

probabilities; you do as much as that in refusing to leave a lighted candle in a powder magazine. What would you think of me, if I turned a smallpox patient loose in a crowd? Nellie is far more dangerous than smallpox. Don't you see — surely you must see! that it would have been better for the community if she had died last summer?"

"Better for the community," Sara said passionately; "but what about Nellie? Would it have been better for Nellie?"

"It could hardly be worse, could it?" he answered dryly; "but if it were worse, better one lost soul than two or three."

"God does n't lose souls so easily," she cried; but he pressed the logic of her hope home.

"Then why not have trusted Him, and let her die? Death is n't the worst thing in the world! And may I remind you" — they had both risen; and from a cruel sort of justice on his part, and a horrified dismay on hers, anger was arising in their eyes — "may I remind you of a poor woman of whom I spoke that day you came to see me about Nellie? She is in

the hospital, broken down absolutely; her brother is in the almshouse, and her mother living on charity. But Nellie Sherman, a thief, a liar, a prostitute, a moral imbecile, is in good health!"

"You have no right to say such things," Sara said, in a low voice. "I had to give that poor creature a chance to save her soul; and to do that I had to save her body" —

"And ruin Jack — body and soul" —

"That was not my business," she flung back at him.

"It was your business!" he said. "It was your business to weigh probabilities. Oh!" he ended, impetuously, "the trouble with us is, nowadays, that we make too much of *life*, and too little of *living*. It is living that is important, not existence! I tell you, Miss Wharton, there is only a limited amount of power in the world; only a limited amount of opportunity, or of money, for that matter; and we are bound to put power and opportunity and money where they will do the most good! Did you put them where they would do the most good?"

Sara flinched, then rallied all her faith. "Dr. Morse, I did the duty which came to my hands; I had no choice."

"No choice?" he repeated. "There is always choice! that 's where responsibility comes in. The good woman and the bad woman may not come and stand hand in hand before you, each asking aid. But the good woman, abstractly, is always dying (or — being tempted to turn into a bad woman, for that matter!), so there is always choice. We 've got to consider moral economics; we 've no business to gratify our selfish sentimentalism at the expense of society!" He was so much in earnest that he did not see how tensely she was holding herself, or what a look of terror had come into her young face.

"The Gospel of Love is all I can plead," she said, in the voice of one insisting to herself; "but it is the salvation of the world!"

All the stern anxiety of his face melted into an exaltation as intense as her own. "Law is the salvation of the world! And law means that the good of the

whole, not the comfort of the individual, shall be considered; it means a love so sane as to permit the mercy of death."

Sara put her hands over her face to hide a burst of tears. Her accuser ground his teeth in helpless discomfort.

"I'm right," he said doggedly, "but I'm a brute; I wish you would forgive me."

She turned from him, unable to speak. He wanted to follow her, to comfort her; to say, as one does to a child or a woman, "Never mind," — but he dared not.

"I'm sorry I've wounded you," he said again miserably; "I hope you will forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she turned and faced him, the tears on her face; "I haven't anything to forgive. Do you suppose I care how you talk to *me?* — if I am right? oh, *if* I am right!"

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